

CE visits Contact Tracing Offices (with photos/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, today (February 1), the first day of the Lunar New Year, visited colleagues on duty at the Contact Tracing Offices in Kai Tak and Mong Kok to encourage them to step up efforts in contact-tracing of COVID-19 confirmed cases in response to the current local epidemic situation. She also extended her New Year greetings to them and thanked them for their hard work during the holidays.

Accompanied by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, and the Director of Health, Dr Ronald Lam, Mrs Lam visited the Office in Kai Tak set up by the Department of Health in January last year and the newly opened Office in Mong Kok in operation since end January this year. The Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Woo Ying-ming, and the Commissioner of Customs and Excise, Ms Louise Ho Pui-shan, also visited the Office in Mong Kok to cheer for colleagues and extended their New Year greetings to them.

Colleagues of the Offices briefed Mrs Lam on the wide range of work on contact-tracing of confirmed cases against the fifth wave of the epidemic in Hong Kong, especially in response to those involving the Omicron variant, in a bid to cut all transmission chains in the community as soon as possible. As a case in point, the "Moon Palace" cluster had earlier been put under control quickly by putting in quarantine, by batch and in an orderly manner, all the 200-odd customers having had meals at the restaurant during the relevant period (of which 80 per cent were contacted within 24 hours), 22 staff members, and over 1 000 close contacts and their family members arising from the 16 confirmed cases in the cluster. Mrs Lam affirmed the efficiency of the Offices and encouraged colleagues to be more patient and empathetic when approaching the close contacts and arranging for their admission to quarantine centres.

The two Offices are currently staffed by more than 400 officers, who are mainly deployed from various disciplinary services with rich investigation experience. Coupled with the professional training provided by the Centre for Health Protection under the Department of Health, the officers can help strengthen the epidemiological investigation as well as the contact-tracing of confirmed cases. The Offices have assisted in tracing more than 31 000 contacts of confirmed cases thus far, with arrangements made to put the relevant people in quarantine in order to reduce the spread of the virus in the community. In the fifth wave of the epidemic, over 60 per cent of the cases epidemiologically linked with imported or local cases have been found in the quarantine centres or cordoned-off buildings under "restriction-testing declarations". In other words, the patients have not been moving about freely in the community by the time of their test results found positive.

Furthermore, over 10 000 serving officers or retirees of the

disciplinary services so far have received training, enabling the Government to deploy more manpower to assist in contact-tracing as needed having regard to the epidemic situation.

"To combat the highly transmissible Omicron variant, the Government is committed to taking swift, targeted and resolute actions to curb the fifth wave of the epidemic as soon as possible. Tracing the close contacts of every confirmed case and speedily arranging for their quarantine, and requiring the close contacts of close contacts to undergo compulsory testing or compulsory quarantine depending on the risk level, are integral parts of the Government's race against time with the virus variant to contain the epidemic," Mrs Lam said.

"I wholeheartedly thank members of the public for being highly co-operative, especially those required to undergo compulsory quarantine during the festive season. The contribution of each and every one of you will help Hong Kong win again in the current wave of the epidemic. I appeal to members of the public again to continue to support the Government's anti-epidemic efforts by staying home and reducing cross-family gatherings as far as possible during the Lunar New Year, and maintaining personal hygiene, in hope of riding out of this wave early and resuming normal life gradually."



