

CHP investigates 14 confirmed and 12 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 11 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases and updates environmental samples results of relevant pet shops

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 22) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 22, the CHP was investigating 14 additional confirmed cases and 12 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 26 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 932 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 210 and four respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 146 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of one imported case, 19 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, three local cases, and three cases epidemiologically linked with local cases. Twenty-five of the cases involve mutant strains, and the mutation test result of one case is pending. The patients comprise 14 males and 12 females, aged nine-month-old to 88. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

A total of 255 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 8 to 21). Eighty-two of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases, six are local cases, seven are cases epidemiologically linked with local case, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12971, 13052, 13054, 13055, 13057, 13058, 13062, 13068, 13076, 13085 and 13090 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 517 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

The CHP is following up on cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 related to pet shops. As of today, 9 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 are related to pet shops, which are 13047, 13059, 13073, 13110, 13118, 13120, 13123, 13124 and 13151. Epidemiological investigations on the cases are ongoing. As at January 22 evening, CHP has collected a total of 738 environmental samples

from relevant pet shops and relevant warehouses, in which a total of 34 environmental samples tested positive. The latest laboratory testing results revealed that environmental samples collected from one additional pet shop (I Love Rabbit at 160 Tung Choi Street, Mong Kok) and one additional warehouse (I Love Rabbit at 27B Lee Garden Road, Causeway Bay) also tested positive. As a prudent measure, the newly added venues above will be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues from January 7 to January 18 need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date(s). The staff members of the two venues above will be arranged to undergo compulsory quarantine at the quarantine centre.

Also, as a passenger flight (ET608) operated by Ethiopian Airlines from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Bangkok, Thailand, arriving in Hong Kong on January 19 had one passenger who tested positive upon arrival, and two passengers who failed to comply with the requirements specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H), the DH thus invoked Cap. 599H to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Addis Ababa and Bangkok operated by Ethiopian Airlines in Hong Kong from January 22 to February 4.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for cases with mutant strains, persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on specified dates in accordance with the announcement by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day (see the details of the buildings and dates of testing at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf).

The CHP strongly reminded members of the public to strictly follow the compulsory testing requirements and undergo the multiple tests on time as required. The compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well. The Government will seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months. Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). The Government reiterates that the aim of issuing a compulsory testing notice is to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community as soon as possible to protect overall public health and safety.

With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to comply with the

recently tightened social distancing measures in the next two weeks, and to refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

â€‹The spokesman for the CHP stressed, "The global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. The CHP strongly urges members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)."