

CHP investigates 21 confirmed and 16 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 17 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases and updates isolation arrangement for discharged patients

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 8) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 8, the CHP was investigating 21 additional confirmed cases and 16 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 37 additional cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings a total number of confirmed cases to 12 770 so far and starting from January 1 recorded 132 asymptomatic cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 12 902 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

In view of the latest development of epidemic situation and demand for quarantine, isolation and treatment facilities, after risk assessment by the Government, with effect from January 8, patients tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus who fulfilled discharge criteria will undergo the 14-day compulsory home isolation and health monitoring in designated places (home or other accommodation).

The newly reported cases consist of 30 imported cases, six cases epidemiologically linked with imported case, and one local case. 29 of the cases involved mutant strains, mutation test results of six cases are pending, while the viral load of the remaining two cases is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise 18 males and 19 females, aged 1 to 74. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The six cases epidemiologically linked with imported case are 12874 (62-year-old female who had a meal together with case 12611 and 12637 at Moon Palace on December 27, 2021), 12879 (4-year-old girl, a family member of case 12767), 12880 (74-year-old male, a co-worker of case 12825), 12882 (32-year-old female, had contact with case 12838 on January 2), 12883 (39-year-old female, a foreign domestic helper, attended the same church at Sea View Estate in North Point as case 12805), and 12903 (44-year-old female, a foreign domestic helper living in Block 6, On Ning Garden, Tsung Kwan O, attended the same church at Sea View Estate in North Point as case 12805). The local case 12872 involves a 58-year-old female and details of the case have been announced yesterday (January 7)

(www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/07/P2022010700835.htm).

A total of 309 cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (December 25, 2021, to January 7, 2022). Twenty-four of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, while the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSC confirmed that cases 12732, 12753, 12756 to 12766, 12821, 12822, 12825 and 12841 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 240 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

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 that 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 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 gathering (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

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)."