

# CHP investigates 48 additional cases of COVID-19 and improves the samples collection arrangement under the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm today (March 20), the CHP is investigating 48 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19, taking the number of cases to 257 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 256 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Regarding the extension of the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme to cover asymptomatic persons under the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) starting yesterday (March 19), with an aim to further facilitate the persons under quarantine to have their family members or friends deliver the deep throat saliva samples for the free testing service for COVID-19, the DH will increase the collection points to cover a number of General Out-patients clinics under the Hospital Authority (collection time: from Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 9:30 am except public holiday). Meanwhile, collection time from 9am to 12noon this Saturday and Sunday (March 21 and 22) will be arranged at the 13 designated chest clinics or dermatological clinics under the DH.

The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP provides testing for 5 000 samples from the relevant persons per week. Persons under quarantine aged 65 or above or persons under quarantine residing with elderly persons aged 65 or above are target individuals at this stage. The DH's personnel will provide a specimen container to the relevant inbound travellers at Hong Kong International Airport. They are required to collect their deep throat saliva sample in the morning on the specified collection date by themselves at home in accordance with the instructions, and to have their family members or friends deliver it to any of the collection points in the morning on the collection date. If a sample tests positive, the CHP will notify the person concerned and arrange for admission to a public hospital for treatment as early as possible. In general, if no notification is received within three working days after returning a sample, it means the test result is negative and the person concerned is required to continue the quarantine until the quarantine period ends.

Today's cases involve 26 males and 22 females aged between four and 69. Among them, 35 had travel history during the incubation period. For case details, please see Annex I. The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For the progress on the contact tracing of the cases, please see Annex II.

For information on flights that patients of the confirmed cases have taken, please refer to the following website: ([www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/flights\\_trains\\_en.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/flights_trains_en.pdf)). Passengers who travelled on the same flights and sat within two seats surrounding those patients are urged to call the CHP hotline 2125 1111 and 2125 1122.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons, who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "In view of proliferation of the disease and continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong."

The spokesman said, "The CHP strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps); cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use; after using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

The CHP will report the cases to the World Health Organization, National Health Commission, Health Commission of Guangdong Province, relevant health authorities and the Hospital Authority.

The CHP has set up the hotlines, which operate from 8am to midnight daily, for public enquiries. As at 4pm yesterday, a total of 40 470 calls were received.

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" ([www.coronavirus.gov.hk](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk)) for announcing the latest updates on various news on the COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including hand hygiene

before wearing and after removing a mask;

- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;

- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a liter of water into each drain outlet (U-traps) to ensure environmental hygiene;

- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;

- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and

- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.