

CHP investigates 53 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, December 23, the CHP was investigating 53 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 8 354 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 8 353 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, six had a travel history during the incubation period.

A total of 1 225 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (December 9 to 22), including 1 140 local cases of which 416 are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see Annex One or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited the specified venues (Annex Two) under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid test according to the compulsory testing notice. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

From tomorrow (December 24) onwards, after the collection of combined nasal and throat swabs of travellers arriving at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) by dedicated staff at the DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at HKIA, the COVID-19 nucleic acid test by reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) on the samples will be conducted at a dedicated laboratory set up by a testing agency at HKIA. The RT-PCR test concerned has a shorter turnaround time and the new arrangement is expected to reduce travellers' waiting time for test results.

In view of the latest epidemic developments in the Mainland, the previous arrangement to provide specimen collection containers to inbound travellers arriving via land boundary control points who have been to Shanghai in the past 14 days will be cancelled from tomorrow. These travellers, if they are not exempted persons, are subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days at a designated place (home or other accommodation) upon arrival in Hong Kong. For the arrangement of distributing specimen collection containers to inbound travellers who have been to Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan Province, Heilongjiang Province and Liaoning Province in the past 14 days arriving via land boundary control points, which has come into effect earlier, remains unchanged.

Regarding the severe epidemic situation, the CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a 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 CHP also 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, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and 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."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, 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 performing 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 doorknobs, 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 litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) 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.