

CHP investigates 67 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) has announced that as of 4pm today (July 16), the CHP was investigating 67 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 1 656 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 1 655 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve 34 males and 33 females aged between four and 94 years. Among them, four had travel history during the incubation period.

In view of an upsurge of confirmed cases in Hong Kong recently and the tight capacity of quarantine centres, the DH has reviewed the quarantine facilities and available capacity. After risk assessment, the DH considered that a certain number of units in quarantine centres must be reserved for quarantining of close contacts of confirmed patients as priority in view of their higher risk of infection. For Hong Kong residents returning from places with high risk of COVID-19 (including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and South Africa) via the Hong Kong International Airport, after excluding confirmed patients and their close contacts on arrival, the rest of them with negative test results are of relatively lower risk of infection. Hence, starting today (July 16), if the capacity of quarantine centres is saturated, the DH might arrange to send this group of people, who need to be quarantined but are of relatively lower risk, to undergo quarantine in hotel rooms rented by the Government when circumstances warrant.

The DH will assess the capacity of quarantine centres every day. The above arrangement will be implemented if the number of returnees from the above high-risk areas exceeds the capacity of quarantine centres available for use that day as these quarantine centres must be reserved for close contacts of confirmed patients as priority.

Upon arrival, these returnees will first have to collect their deep throat saliva samples at the DH's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at AsiaWorld-Expo. If the test result is negative, they will be transferred in coaches to hotel rooms to complete their 14-day compulsory quarantine. If the test result is positive, they will be sent to hospitals for treatment while their close contacts will be sent to quarantine centres.

The DH will issue quarantine orders to these returnees in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E). The relevant government department will also arrange electronic wristbands for them. According to quarantine orders, they shall neither leave their hotel rooms nor move around in the hotel during the entire quarantine period. Leaving designated rooms will be regarded as a breach of the quarantine order and constitutes a criminal offence. Offenders

are subject to a maximum imprisonment for six months and fine of \$25,000.

The DH will closely monitor the situation locally and overseas, and will adjust the arrangement in a timely manner if necessary.

As for the local cases, the CHP will distribute deep throat saliva specimen bottles to residents of buildings where the patients live, as well as to those with whom they might have had contact during the infectious period. However, as there are recently a large number of confirmed cases, the relevant testing capacity remained limited even though the DH has earlier procured testing services directly from local private laboratories to enhance public testing capacity. Hence, the CHP will, based on risk assessment, accord priority to people with higher risk (for example, those who live in buildings with more than one unit with confirmed cases of unknown source) when distributing specimen bottles for testing. People are also urged to seek medical attention early even if mild symptoms develop to help prevent the spread of the disease in the community.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

In view of 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. As a number of recent cases involve elderly people, 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 every day tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

A spokesman for the CHP 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 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 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.