

CHP investigates 70 confirmed and 39 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 24) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 24, the CHP was investigating 70 additional confirmed cases and 39 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 109 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 13 104 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 287 and four respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 395 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of 11 imported cases, 85 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, five local cases, and eight cases epidemiologically linked with local cases. Ninety-nine of the cases involve mutant strains, the mutation test results of nine cases are pending and the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation test. The patients comprise 57 males and 52 females, aged 4 to 85. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

A total of 351 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 10 to 23). 201 of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases, 12 are local cases, 19 are cases epidemiologically linked with local case, and the rest are imported cases.

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.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that 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. With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures, 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.