

CHP investigates 81 confirmed and 26 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 85 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 26) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 26, the CHP was investigating 81 additional confirmed cases and 26 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 107 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 13 262 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 358 and six respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 626 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of seven imported cases, 79 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, seven local cases, and 14 cases epidemiologically linked with local cases. Eighty-eight of the cases involve mutant strains, the mutation test results of 18 cases are pending and the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise 54 males and 53 females, aged 1 to 85. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

With regard to the cases tested positive recently in Block 1, Tropicana Gardens in Wong Tai Sin, apart from the units E involved in relevant cases earlier, the CHP also identified a case tested positive (case 13622) at the building, who lives in unit F on a floor with cases detected before. It is suspected that the virus might have transmitted through the yard area of adjacent units after initial investigation. Taking into account the opinions from experts, the CHP will arrange residents of units F on 6th to 8th floor to undergo quarantine at a quarantine centre.

A total of 539 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 12 to 25). Three-hundred-and-fifty-three of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases, 22 are local cases, 36 are cases epidemiologically linked with local case, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 13113, 13126, 13128 to 13131, 13133 to 13135, 13137 to 13143, 13145, 13148 to 13150, 13155, 13156, 13159 to 13163, 13165 to 13175, 13177 to 13179, 13181 to 13186, 13191, 13197, 13198, 13206 to 13208, 13210, 13217 to 13221, 13224, 13225, 13228, 13231 to

13235, 13237, 13240, 13241, 13243, 13245 to 13247, 13252, 13255, 13257, 13263, 13269 and 13286 to 13291 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 641 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

Also, as a passenger flight (EK384) operated by Emirates from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, and Bangkok, Thailand, arriving in Hong Kong on January 24 had five passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Dubai and Bangkok operated by Emirates in Hong Kong from January 26 to February 8.

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.