

CHP investigates additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases by nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests as well as 11 imported cases earlier involving Omicron mutant strain sub-lineage BA.2.12.1

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (May 20) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, May 20, the CHP was investigating 101 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by nucleic acid tests (26 confirmed cases, 63 asymptomatic cases and 12 cases with pending case status) in the past 24 hours. Separately, 142 additional positive cases through rapid antigen tests (RATs) (76 symptomatic cases and 66 asymptomatic cases) were reported. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 761 025 and 448 906 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The aforementioned newly reported cases consist of 26 imported cases (20 cases and 6 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively). The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations on the cases. Please refer to the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

Meanwhile, whole genome sequencing analysis by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed that 11 earlier imported cases were found to carry the sub-lineage BA.2.12.1 under the Omicron mutant strain. The cases involve six males and five females aged 19 to 65 who arrived in Hong Kong from the United States, Turkey, the Netherlands and Nepal during the period from May 3 to 15. Six cases tested positive on arrival, three cases tested positive during compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotel, while the remaining two cases tested positive with their samples collected at community testing centre after completion of compulsory quarantine. Together with the above new cases, Hong Kong has recorded a total of 46 imported cases with BA.2.12.1.

The two cases involving the sub-lineage BA.2.12.1 who tested positive at community testing centre involve a couple (a 65-year-old male and a 64-year-old female), who arrived in Hong Kong from the United States on May 3. They tested negative on arrival and their several tests conducted during compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotel (Lan Kwai Fong Hotel @ Kau U Fong) all tested negative. Upon completion of compulsory quarantine on May 10, they returned to their residence at Tam Kung Temple Road in Shau Kei Wan. They later underwent testing at community testing centre on May 14

according to prevailing requirements and tested positive. For prudence sake, the places where the couple had visited after leaving the hotel will be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing tomorrow or the day after.

The couple stayed in room 3204 of the hotel from May 3 to 10. According to the epidemiological investigation of the CHP, during May 7 to 10, a father and son (aged 62 and 27) had stayed in room 3304 of the hotel upon arrival in Hong Kong from Nepal on May 7. They tested positive on May 10 and 11 respectively during their compulsory quarantine at the hotel. According to the whole genome sequencing conducted by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch, the genetic sequences of the couple who had stayed in room 3204 and the 27-year-old man who had stayed in room 3304 are identical, suggesting that they are very likely to be epidemiologically linked.

The CHP has co-ordinated with related government departments and experts to conduct a site inspection to the hotel today to investigate and examine if environmental factors were involved in the infection of the cases. It was preliminarily considered that vertical transmission of virus from a room on a floor to another room on another floor is involved. The CHP's epidemiological investigation is ongoing.

In addition, as of 0.00am, May 20, a total of 9 157 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 9 079 and 75 deaths reported from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as three deaths reported from the Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 9 370 death cases that have tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Furthermore, among the earlier cases by nucleic acid tests reported, there were cases (including pending cases) changed to confirmed, asymptomatic or re-positive cases. As at yesterday (May 19), the total number of confirmed cases was 331 855, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 198 542, 23 and 230 504 respectively.

As the passenger flight (AC007) operated by Air Canada arriving in Hong Kong from Vancouver, Canada, on May 19, had one passenger who failed to comply with the requirements specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H), as well as five passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked Cap. 599H to prohibit the landing of passenger flights in Hong Kong from Vancouver operated by Air Canada from May 21 to 25.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that as the local situation of COVID-19 infection is still severe, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with social distancing measures, avoid going out and refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings. This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

â€‹â€‹The spokesman reminded that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. People who have yet to receive vaccination, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection and to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill and death should they get infected.