

CHP investigates additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases by nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests as well as four imported cases earlier involving Omicron mutant strain sub-lineage BA.4

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 17) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, May 17, the CHP was investigating 166 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by nucleic acid tests (52 confirmed cases, 96 asymptomatic cases and 18 cases with pending case status) in the past 24 hours. Separately, 162 additional positive cases through rapid antigen tests (RATs) (91 symptomatic cases and 71 asymptomatic cases) were reported. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 760 681 and 448 387 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 39 imported cases (33 cases and six 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 four earlier imported cases were found to carry the sub-lineage BA.4 under the Omicron mutant strain. The cases involve three males and one female aged 42 to 67 who arrived in Hong Kong from the United Kingdom and Canada on May 8. All of them tested positive during compulsory quarantine at designated quarantine hotels. Together with the above new cases, Hong Kong has recorded seven imported sub-lineage BA.4 cases in total so far. No cases of the sub-lineage were found in the local community so far, and the CHP will continue to closely monitor the latest developments.

In addition, as of 0.00am, May 17, a total of 9 148 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded (i.e. no new reported cases), with 9 070 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 9 361 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 16), the total number of confirmed cases was 331 672, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive

cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 198 255, 23 and 230 565 respectively.

As a passenger flight (QR818) operated by Qatar Airways arriving in Hong Kong from Doha, Qatar, on May 15, had three passengers who tested positive upon arrival, as well as 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), the DH thus invoked Cap. 599H to prohibit the landing of passenger flights in Hong Kong from Doha operated by Qatar Airways from May 17 to 21.

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€‹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.