

# CHP investigates COVID-19 preliminary positive case involving mutant strain at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court in Tuen Mun

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 23) said that it is investigating a preliminary positive imported-related case of COVID-19 involving a mutant strain.

The case involves a 64-year-old male patient living at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun. He is a toilet cleaner working at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). The patient received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination on July 10 and August 10 (CoronaVac) in Hong Kong. According to his job nature, he has to undergo frequent regular COVID-19 testing and he tested negative in 10 tests during December 2 to 20. His specimen collected yesterday (December 22) in the mobile specimen collection station at HKIA tested preliminarily positive with a Ct value about 27 to 32. He developed symptoms on the same day. Testing by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch revealed that the spike protein gene of the patient's sample involves N501Y and T478K mutations (negative for the L452R and E484K strains), hence the CHP suspects at this stage that the patient carries the Omicron variant, but a whole genome sequencing still needs to be conducted to confirm whether the patient carries the Omicron variant.

A preliminary investigation revealed that he has no recent travel history and he mainly performed cleaning and disinfection work at a designated toilet solely for use by preliminary positive imported cases confined at a designated area at the Midfield Concourse of HKIA while waiting for transfer to hospital. He last went to work on December 22. He had stayed inside the storeroom situated inside the toilet during work and had been in the toilet with preliminary positive cases at the same time. The CHP has conducted a site visit at HKIA today and collected 26 environmental samples at the storeroom, a changing room and a restroom used by the patient with the test results pending.

A preliminary investigation showed that the patient has likely acquired the infection during his work at the toilet for preliminary positive cases. In view of the relatively high Ct value and multiple negative tests in the past 21 days, the case was likely detected at a very early stage of infection by regular testing.

The CHP has advised the Airport Authority Hong Kong and the contractor concerned that the cleaners should only perform cleaning and disinfection work after the preliminary positive cases have left the toilet after use, and the cleaners should not stay inside the storeroom in toilet when they are not performing work.

As the patient carries a mutant strain with higher transmissibility and risk of infection, the Government has made a "restriction-testing declaration" tonight for the building where the patient resided in Hong Kong (On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun) and persons who resided or worked at the building will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. The places where he had visited in Hong Kong during the incubation period will also be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date. An epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue.

The spokesman for the CHP said, "The Government has remained vigilant and has been closely monitoring the latest scientific data on mutant strains as well as the epidemic situation of various places. The most stringent anti-epidemic measures will be implemented to prevent the mutant strain from spreading in the local community."

At the moment, the adverse impact on the epidemic situation caused by the newly emerged mutant strains is not fully known yet, but vaccination is still essential to prevent severe cases and deaths from COVID-19 infection. The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website ([www.covidvaccine.gov.hk](http://www.covidvaccine.gov.hk)).