

CHP investigates eight confirmed and six asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 17 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 13) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 13, the CHP was investigating eight additional confirmed cases and six additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 14 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch in those 24 hours). In addition, among the earlier cases reported since January 1, there are 23 asymptomatic cases at time of reporting changed to confirmed cases after hospital admission. This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 829 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 187 asymptomatic cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 016 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of nine imported cases, four cases epidemiologically linked with imported case and one possibly import-related case. All of the cases involved mutant strains. The patients comprise six males and eight females, aged 19 to 83. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The four cases epidemiologically linked with imported case are 13010 (83-year-old female who is a household contact of case 12985), 13012 (20-year-old male who visited the Nabe Urawa at Hysan Place in Causeway Bay for dinner in the evening on January 4), 13014 (19-year-old male who claimed to be a family member of case 12913 not living together) and 13021 (40-year-old female who is a household contact of case 12913). The possibly import-related case is 13011 (32-year-old male who lives in a unit B but on different floor of the residence of case 12985 at Maple Gardens Phase III, North Point).

A total of 383 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (December 30, 2021, to January 12, 2022). Fifty-four of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, one is a 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 12842, 12845 to 12853, 12856, 12857, 12859, 12863, 12866, 12867 and 12869 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 327 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

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.

With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures in the next two weeks, 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.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed, "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, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. The CHP strongly urges members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)."