

CHP investigates five additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 and provides update on a vaccine strain contamination case

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, August 22, the CHP was investigating five additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 12 058 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 12 057 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases are imported cases.

The CHP reported the latest epidemiological findings regarding a case involving a 32-year-old male whose specimen submitted was suspected to be contaminated by vaccine strain. The man's throat specimen taken at the clinic of a private doctor on August 16 was tested positive by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the DH but with low viral load (Ct value of 34-37) while his test results for the virus and the antibody were both negative after admission to the hospital. The private doctor had provided Sinovac vaccination for other members of the public at the same location of the clinic before he took the specimen for the patient. According to the genetic analysis of the patient's specimen conducted by the Department of Microbiology of the University of Hong Kong, it was compatible with the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine strain.

After examining the clinical, epidemiological and laboratory findings, the CHP considered that case is compatible with vaccine strain contamination and hence will not be classified as a case of COVID-19 infection. The relevant close contacts have been released from the quarantine centre after obtaining a negative test result.

A total of 41 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (August 8 to 21) including a local case with unknown sources and an import-related case, while the rest are imported cases.

In view of the fact that many recent imported cases have joined non-essential travel after vaccination, 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 urged 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)."

The spokesman reminded, "If travel is unavoidable, the CHP highly recommended the public to be fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines before their departure. They should continue to wear a surgical mask and maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene at all times. Parents are also urged to avoid taking unvaccinated children travelling."

Separately, according to the testing and quarantine arrangements for local COVID-19 cases with mutant strains, the CHP reminded that persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on days 3, 7, 12 and 19 following the announcement of the relevant confirmed cases by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day. Relevant deadlines of compulsory testing for respective specified premises are listed on the Government's website

at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf

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Specified persons in relation to the following specified premises are also reminded to undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the compulsory testing notice tomorrow (August 23):

– Mei Yat House, Yat Tung (II) Estate, 8 Yat Tung Road, Tung Chung.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

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). Generally speaking, vaccines can reduce the chance of transmission by those who have been vaccinated. People vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine can also generate herd immunity. Moreover, vaccination may help keep people from getting seriously ill even if they do get COVID-19.

The CHP called on members of the public to pay attention to their health condition, seek medical advice early and undergo COVID-19 nucleic acid testing as soon as possible if respiratory symptoms develop. They should also maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene at all times, to protect themselves against infection and prevent the spread of the disease in the community.

On a personal level, members of the public should put on a surgical mask when they need to go out. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask. Hand hygiene should be performed frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after

coughing or sneezing. Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds, then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative. Cover the mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly.

To ensure household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) by pouring about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap). They should also pay attention to hygiene when using the toilet by putting the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs.