

CHP investigates five additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 and seven additional Omicron cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, December 24, the CHP was investigating five additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 12 556 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 12 555 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, four are imported cases and one is an import-related case. All of them involved mutant strains. The patients comprise two males and three females, aged 20 to 64. For the imported cases, one of them arrived in Hong Kong from a Group A specified place (high-risk) with enhanced surveillance and the other three from Group A specified places (high-risk). Two patients tested positive during the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and two tested positive during quarantine.

The import-related case (12557) involves a 64-year-old man who lives in On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun. He is a cleaner 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 has no recent travel history. The CHP announced the case's details last night (December 23)

(www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202112/23/P2021122300711.htm). He tested positive on December 23 for antibody after admission, which is compatible with his history of vaccination. The Ct value for the test after admission was less than 30. The 26 environmental samples collected by the CHP during the site visit yesterday at HKIA tested negative. Also, the CHP has arranged for about 14 of his close contacts and about 40 household contacts and close contacts of those close contacts to conduct quarantine at a quarantine centre. There has been no relevant confirmed case so far. The CHP's epidemiological investigation of the case is ongoing and further genetic analysis and comparison with recent imported cases with N501Y and T478K mutant strains are continuing. As the patient may carry the Omicron variant, the CHP will adopt the most stringent prevention and control measures. The Government made a "restriction-testing declaration" last night for the building where the patient resides in Hong Kong. The compulsory testing frequency has also been increased for persons who resided or worked in the same building as the residence of the case. The relevant persons will be subject to compulsory testing on December 25, 26, 27, 30, January 4 and January 11, 2022 (see the details at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf).

A total of 72 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (December 10 to 23) and all of them are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the CHP provided an update on the latest investigations on seven imported cases announced on December 20 and 22 (cases 12538, 12548, 12549, 12551, 12552, 12553 and 12554), involving three males and four females aged between 18 and 61. The whole genome sequencing analysis conducted by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed that the seven cases all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Five of them tested positive during the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at the TSCC and two of them tested positive during quarantine.

Together with the seven aforementioned cases, there are so far 41 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

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 "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

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)."