

CHP investigates locally acquired SARS-CoV-2 virus cases with 3 821 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and 12 150 cases by RATs as well as 982 imported cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 21) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, December 21, the CHP was investigating 15 971 additional locally acquired cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, comprising 3 821 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (1 817 confirmed cases, 1 659 asymptomatic cases and 345 cases with pending status) and 12 150 cases that tested positive by rapid antigen tests (RATs) in the past 24 hours.

Separately, 982 additional imported cases were reported, including 776 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests (134 confirmed cases, 557 asymptomatic cases and 85 cases with pending status) and 206 cases that tested positive by RATs. Among the additional imported cases, 489 of them involved samples at the airport, 378 of them involved samples during Day 1 to Day 3, and the remaining 115 involved samples during Day 4 to Day 7.

Hong Kong has recorded a total of 1 123 458 and 1 278 780 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations of the cases. Please refer to the Annex and the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

The CHP has been closely monitoring the situation of positive cases involving mutant strains by genetic analysis. As of 0.00am, December 21, the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) had identified 226 cases of sub-lineage XBB, six of XBD, eight of BA.2.75.2, seven of BA.4.6, 13 of BF.7 and 38 of BQ.1.1 among imported cases in Hong Kong, while 149 cases of sub-lineage XBB, 18 of XBD, one of BA.2.75.2, 11 of BF.7 and 171 of BQ.1.1 have also been detected among local cases.

Among the specimens received by the DH's PHLSB during December 12 to 18 for verification testing of local cases, 0 per cent and about 52.78 per cent of them (seven-day moving average) are related to the sub-lineages BA.2.12.1 and BA.4/BA.5 (including suspected cases) of the Omicron mutant strain respectively.

In addition, as of 0.00am, December 21, a total of 11 080 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 10 977 and 99 deaths reported

from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as four deaths reported from private hospitals. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 11 293 death cases that 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 (December 20), the total number of confirmed cases was 489 203, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 379 828, 31 and 249 799 respectively.

The spokesman for the CHP said 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, children 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.

The CHP appeals to the community to keep on maintaining personal hygiene and comply with social distancing measures in order to jointly contain the risk of virus transmission. The spokesman reminded members of the public that they can call various hotlines to make enquiries on COVID-19 (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html#hotline).