

CHP investigates nine confirmed and five asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and updates classification of case 13072 and identifies 16 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 20) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 20, the CHP was investigating nine additional confirmed cases and five 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 (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). In addition, among the earlier cases reported since January 1, there are 18 asymptomatic cases at the time of reporting changed to confirmed cases after hospital admission, while one case tested positive earlier (case 13032) turned out to be a re-positive case after investigation. This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 907 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 185 and four respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 096 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of four imported cases, seven cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, one local case, and two possibly local-related case. Thirteen of the cases involve mutant strains, while the mutation test result of the remaining one case is pending. The patients comprise 10 males and four females, aged 1 to 59. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The seven cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13091 (14-year-old male who is a family member of case 13097 living together); 13092 (28-year-old male who is a close contact of case 13072); 13093 (58-year-old female who is a teacher at Delia Memorial School (Broadway), 80-86 Broadway, Mei Foo); 13097, 13098 and 13099 (three males aged between 11 and 16 who are close contacts of case 13079); and 13101 (12-year-old male who studies at Delia Memorial School (Broadway), 80-86 Broadway, Mei Foo). The two possibly local-related cases are 13090 (53-year-old male who works at the Cathay Pacific Cargo Terminal at Hong Kong International Airport and lives in Yat Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate, Kwai Chung, which is the same block as case 13085) and 13100 (1-year-old girl who visited her family member living in Yat Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate, Kwai Chung). The local case is 13088 (17-year-old male who studies at St Joseph's Anglo-Chinese School in Kwun Tong).

Also, after comparing the genetic sequencing, it was confirmed that the genomes of case 13072 were identical to the genomes of a case epidemiologically linked with imported case earlier (case 13045). It was also found that case 13072 had a brief encounter with cases 13067 and 13069 (family members of case 13045) on January 14 at Mei Foo MTR Station. Case 13072 is thus reclassified from a local case to epidemiologically linked with imported case.

A total of 283 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 6 to 19). Seventy-three of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, four are local cases, two are cases epidemiologically linked with 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 12999, 13028, 13036, 13037, 13044, 13051, 13056, 13063 to 13067 and 13069 to 13072 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 495 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.

â€‹â€‹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)."