

CHP investigates seven confirmed and four asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and updates quarantine requirements for close contacts of locally acquired cases tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 16) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 16, the CHP was investigating seven additional confirmed cases and four additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 11 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours), while one earlier tested positive case (Case 13022) turned out to be a re-positive case after investigation. This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 864 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 174 asymptomatic cases and three re-positive cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 041 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of eight imported cases, one case epidemiologically linked with imported case, and two possibly import-related cases. All of the cases involved mutant strains. The patients comprise five males and six females, aged 22 to 74. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The case epidemiologically linked with imported case is 13039 (74-year-old male who is a household contact of case 12860). The two possibly import-related cases are 13041 (40-year-old female who is a cargo aircraft cabin cleaning worker working at the Hong Kong International Airport) and 13045 (43-year-old female who conducted compulsory quarantine at Silka Seaview Hotel Hong Kong in Yau Ma Tei after arrival in Hong Kong from Pakistan, during which her six tests conducted all tested negative. Upon completion of the compulsory quarantine, she returned to Tung Moon House, Tai Hang Tung Estate, 83 Tai Hang Tung Road, Sham Shui Po. She later tested positive at a community testing centre).

A total of 363 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 2 to 15). Sixty of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, two are local cases, and the rest are imported cases.

Taking into consideration the relatively short incubation period of infection with the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP announced on January 10 the updated quarantine requirements for close contacts of locally acquired cases,

shortening their quarantine period from 21 days to 14 days. Also, a number of persons undergoing quarantine recently submitted applications to shorten the quarantine period in quarantine centre by providing their COVID-19 vaccination records in accordance with established arrangement. The CHP will conduct a special arrangement starting tomorrow, under which those who have finished the 14 days of quarantine at quarantine centre (except for those under Cap. 599E) will be tested for the virus. If they test negative, they will be arranged to leave the quarantine centre in a gradual and orderly manner. Their original 21-day quarantine period will be shortened for one to seven days. Afterwards, they have to undergo self-monitoring at home for the remaining days of their original quarantine period. Though they will not be prohibited from going out during self-monitoring, they should monitor their health conditions, maintain social distance with other people and avoid social gatherings. They are also subject to testing at a community testing centre on Day 19, counting from the last day of exposure to the case tested positive.

Also, as a passenger flight (U0705) operated by Hong Kong Express Airways arriving in Hong Kong from Bangkok, Thailand, on January 14 had one passenger who tested positive upon arrival, and one passenger who failed to comply with the requirements specified under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H), the DH thus invoked Cap. 599H to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Bangkok operated by Hong Kong Express Airways in Hong Kong from January 16 to 29.

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)."