

CHP investigates six confirmed and 12 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 26 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 18) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 18, the CHP was investigating six additional confirmed cases and 12 additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 18 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) in those 24 hours). This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 873 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 190 asymptomatic cases and three re-positive cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 066 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of seven imported cases, 10 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, and one case epidemiologically linked with local case. Sixteen of the cases involve mutant strains, while the mutation test results of the remaining two cases are pending. The patients comprise 10 males and eight females, aged 1 to 67. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The 10 cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13056 (46-year-old female, who is a household contact of case 13014) and 13063 to 13071 (six males and three females, aged 1 to 46). The nine patients are close contacts of case 13045, including five family members living together (cases 13064, 13067, and 13069 to 13071). The case epidemiologically linked with local case is 13059 (67-year-old female, who visited Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay on January 8 and had contact with case 13047).

A total of 326 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 4 to 17). Sixty-five of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, three are local cases, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12800, 12807, 12810, 12817, 12870, 12944, 12996, 13003, 13005 to 13007, 13016, 13018, 13020, 13023 to 13027, 13029 to 13031, 13033, 13034, 13041 and 13045 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 479 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

Also, as the passenger flights (AY101) operated by Finnair arriving in

Hong Kong from Helsinki, Finland, within a seven-day period (January 11 to 17) had four passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights from Helsinki operated by Finnair in Hong Kong from January 18 to 31.

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)."