

CHP investigates three additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, November 11, the CHP was investigating three additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 12 378 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 12 377 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases are imported cases which involved mutant strains. The patients comprise two males and one female, aged 33 to 62 years. Two of them arrived in Hong Kong from Group A specified places (high-risk) and one arrived from a Group B specified place (medium-risk). Two patients tested positive during quarantine and the remaining one tested positive during the "test-and-hold" arrangement upon arrival at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at Hong Kong International Airport.

A total of 39 cases have been reported in the past 14 days (October 28 to November 10) and all of them are imported cases.

Regarding the two Hong Kong-based cargo flight crew cases (case 12376 and 12378) reported yesterday (November 10), the whole genome sequencing analysis done by the University of Hong Kong showed that both of them were Delta strain (B.1.617.2) with highly similar but not identical genetic sequences. They belong to the Delta strain sub-lineage AY.43, a strain which is common in Europe, especially Germany. Meanwhile, the CHP is following up on the epidemiological investigations and genetic sequencing of another case (12379) to rule out its linkage with the two aforementioned cases. The viral load of case 12379 was very low and the available genetic sequencing result showed that it was not related to case 12376 or 12378. Also, the genetic sequences of these three cases were not related to other previously confirmed cases in Hong Kong. The results suggest that cases 12376 and 12378 acquired the infection outside Hong Kong, while case 12379 previously acquired the infection outside Hong Kong and is classified as an imported re-positive case.

In addition, The CHP continues to follow up on all imported cases involving mutant strains by conducting whole genome sequencing to identify the lineage of the variant strains. According to the latest sequencing analysis conducted by the Centre's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch, it is confirmed that the virus strain of imported case 12374 matched the Delta strain sub-lineage AY.4.2. Case 12374 travelled to Hong Kong on November 1 via the same flight (BA027) as imported case 12357, whose virus strain also matched sub-lineage AY.4.2 as announced on November 5. Their seats were close to each other, with seat numbers 2B and 2E respectively. The CHP's epidemiological investigation is ongoing.

AY.4.2 is a newly designated sub-lineage of the Delta strain. According to the World Health Organization, an increase in AY.4.2 viruses has been

observed globally since July 2021 and over 26 000 AY.4.2 sequences from 42 countries had been uploaded to the online genome database GISAID by the end of October 2021. The majority (93 per cent) of these sequences were reported from the United Kingdom, where a gradual increase in the proportion of AY.4.2 has been observed. It was reported that AY.4.2 might be more transmissible than other Delta strains, especially among household members. So far, preliminary analysis in the United Kingdom does not find a significant reduction in vaccine effectiveness for AY.4.2 compared to other Delta strains.

The Government announced on October 26 that patients fulfilling the discharge criteria have to be immediately arranged by point-to-point transfer to designated isolation facilities to undergo the 14-day isolation and health monitoring through a close-loop management arrangement. From today onwards, Dorsett Kwun Tong hotel will replace the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre as the designated isolation facility. The DH is arranging a total of 37 discharged patients to Dorsett Kwun Tong to complete their remaining isolation today.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for local COVID-19 cases with mutant strains, the CHP reminded people that persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on days 3, 7, 12 and 19 following the announcement of the relevant confirmed cases by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day. Relevant deadlines of compulsory testing for respective specified premises are listed on the Government's website at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf

Specified persons in relation to the following specified premises are also reminded to undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the compulsory testing notice tomorrow (November 12):

- Harbour Pinnacle, 8 Minden Avenue, Tsim Sha Tsui

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 list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk). The DH has also been closely monitoring the mutant strains of SARS CoV-2 and has uploaded the relevant information on Variants of Concern (VOCs) and Variants of Interest (VOIs), based on whole genome sequencing results, to the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/statistics/data/10/641/100135/6973.html). The data will be updated regularly.

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)."

The spokesman reminded, "If travel is unavoidable, the CHP highly recommends the public to be fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines before their departure. They should avoid participating in non-essential mass gatherings or events held outside Hong Kong. They should continue to wear a surgical mask and maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene at all times. Parents are also urged to avoid taking unvaccinated children travelling."

The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk). Generally speaking, COVID-19 vaccination can prevent COVID-19 infection, and if infected, reduce the risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.

The CHP called on members of the public to pay attention to their health condition, seek medical advice early and undergo COVID-19 nucleic acid testing as soon as possible if respiratory symptoms develop. They should also maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene at all times to protect themselves against infection and prevent the spread of the disease in the community. For more related health advice, please refer to the website www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/health-advice.html.