

CHP investigates three confirmed and four asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 40 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 17) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 17, the CHP was investigating three additional confirmed cases and four additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were seven 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 12 867 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 178 asymptomatic cases and three re-positive cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 048 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of three imported cases, three cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, and one local case. Six of the cases involve mutant strains, while the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise four males and three females, aged 11 to 46. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The three cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13051 (17-year-old male), 13052 (11-year-old girl) and 13053 (46-year-old female). They are the household contacts of case 13014. The local case is case 13047 (23-year-old female living in 2-4 Tung Sing Road, Aberdeen, who works in Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay).

A total of 348 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 3 to 16). Sixty-three of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, two 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 12952 to 12960, 12962, 12964, 12965, 12967 to 12970, 12972 to 12989, 13008, 13009, 13013, 13015, 13017 and 13019 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 453 cases involving Omicron in Hong Kong.

Also, as a passenger flight (TK083) operated by Turkish Airlines arriving in Hong Kong from Istanbul, Turkey, on January 15 had three 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 Istanbul operated by Turkish Airlines in Hong Kong from January 17 to 30.

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)."