

CHP investigates three confirmed and two asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 17 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 15) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 15, the CHP was investigating three additional confirmed cases and two additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were five 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 12 857 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 171 asymptomatic cases and two re-positive cases. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 030 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of three imported cases and two cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases. Four of the cases involved mutant strains, while the viral load of the remaining case is insufficient for mutation tests. The patients comprise one male and four females, aged 21 to 85. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The two cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13031 (51-year-old female who is a close contact of case 13004 and also works as a security guard at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre) and 13033 (85-year-old male who is a household contact of case 12985).

A total of 375 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 1 to 14). Fifty-nine 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 12942, 12943, 12946 to 12950, 12990, 12991, 12993 to 12995, 13010 to 13012, 13014 and 13021 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 413 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.

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)."