

CHP investigates two confirmed and seven asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases and identifies 69 additional Omicron cases from previously announced cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 14) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 14, the CHP was investigating two additional confirmed cases and seven additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were nine 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 12 854 so far and starting from January 1 recorded, with 169 asymptomatic cases and two re-positive cases (Cases 12819 and 12886). Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 025 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of six imported cases, two cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases and one local case. All of the cases involved mutant strains. The patients comprise four males and five females, aged 21 to 48. 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 13026 (21-year-old female who worked at the clinic at Gold Coast Piazza on January 3 when cases 12987 and 12988 sought medical attention there) and 13027 (46-year-old female who is a household contact of case 12860). The local case 13022 involves a 29-year-old male patient living at Yat Wan House, Tin Yat Estate, Tin Shui Wai. He worked at construction sites in Kai Tak and Tai Po, and as a takeaway food courier in Yuen Long. He last went to work on January 6, January 12 and January 10 respectively. He was admitted to hospital on January 12 because of a traffic accident, and tested preliminarily positive in the admission screening, with a Ct value larger than 30. Initial investigation revealed that he has no recent travel history and has not visited places where cases that tested positive appeared. The CHP has so far not found any close contacts between the case and other recent cases that tested positive, and is now investigating the places where the patient visited in the past 21 days in order to ascertain the infection source and to terminate the silent transmission chains in the community.

Separately, the test result of the PHLSB for confirmation of a case that tested preliminarily positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus indicates that the sample was possibly contaminated by a vaccine strain. The case involves a 22-year-old female patient living in Block 2, Hoi Tak Gardens, 13-17 Wing Fat

Lane, Tuen Mun. She is a nurse who works at three clinics of JP Partners Medical in Tuen Mun (Gold Coast Piazza; Lin Wong Building, 2-14 Tak Ching Court; and New Town Mansion, Tuen Lee Street), same as case 13026. The sample tested preliminary positive by a private laboratory with a Ct value larger than 30. Testing by the PHLSB confirmed that the sample does not carry the N501Y mutant strain but carried the D614D strain, which is compatible with the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine strain. The test result for the virus after admission to hospital was negative and she did not have any conditions that could be caused by a real infection. As the sample was taken at a clinic of JP Partners Medical in Chi Lok Fa Yuen, the CHP visited the relevant clinic today to understand the situation. Initial analysis revealed that the positive test results of the sample were not caused by infection. After examining the clinical, epidemiological and laboratory findings, the CHP considered that the case is compatible with vaccine strain contamination and hence will not be classified as a case of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection. The quarantine order of her close contacts will be lifted.

A total of 385 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (December 31, 2021, to January 13, 2022). Fifty-nine of them are epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, one is a local case, and the rest are imported cases.

Meanwhile, the whole genome sequencing analysis of cases announced earlier conducted by the PHLSB confirmed that cases 12667, 12668, 12691, 12769, 12799, 12811, 12855, 12862, 12865, 12868, 12871, 12874, 12877 to 12885, 12887 to 12904, 12906, 12907, 12911 to 12914, 12916 to 12928, 12930 to 12937, 12939, 12940 and 13004 all carried the Variant of Concern Omicron. Together with the aforementioned cases, there are so far 396 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)."