

DH to strengthen health quarantine arrangements on inbound travellers from Italy's three regions and Iran

Following the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's announcement today (February 28) on the Red Outbound Travel Alert issued on Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto regions in Italy which cover Bologna, Milan, Venice and Verona in response to the latest situations of COVID-19 and that the HKSAR Government alerted the public about the outbreak of COVID-19 cases and associated public health risk in Iran under the Red Outbound Travel Alert currently in force, the Department of Health (DH) will also strengthen health quarantine arrangements on inbound travellers arriving from these regions.

Starting from 0.00am on March 1, the DH's Port Health Division will issue quarantine orders under the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A) to people (regardless of whether they are Hong Kong residents) arriving Hong Kong who have been to Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy or Veneto regions in Italy or Iran in the past 14 days and arrange them to stay in quarantine centre for quarantine.

In view of the latest situations of COVID-19 overseas, the DH's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) will further update relevant reporting criteria to enhance surveillance of suspected cases. Medical practitioners are requested to report to the CHP any individual fulfilling the following for further investigation:

- Presented with fever or acute respiratory illness or pneumonia; and
- Either one of the following conditions within 14 days before onset of symptom:
 1. With travel history to a place with active community transmission of COVID-19; or
 2. Had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The CHP has issued letters to doctors and private hospitals to inform them of the updated reporting criteria.

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded members of the public that the HKSAR Government draws up corresponding port health and quarantine measures in response to the health risk of individual countries/areas. Before travelling outside Hong Kong, members of the public should beware of the potential health risk and applicable quarantine arrangements upon returning to Hong Kong.

A spokesman for the CHP said that the Government will conduct a thorough risk assessment before formulating the port health measures in response to the occurrence of outbreak in other countries or areas. The assessment will

take into account factors such as the number, distribution and rate of increase of infected persons, measures put in place for surveillance and control of the outbreak, and the frequency of visit by Hong Kong residents. The Government will review and adjust the measures in accordance with the development of the outbreak.

Since the end of December last year, the accumulated number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 across the globe has kept on rising, with significant figures recorded in neighbouring countries and regions. As at 6pm today, the number of confirmed cases on the Mainland was 78 824, among which the number of cases recorded in Hubei Province was the highest with 65 914 cases. Countries frequently visited by Hong Kong people including Korea, Italy, Japan and Singapore recorded 2 337, 650, 210 (together with at least 705 cases related to the Diamond Princess cruise) and 93 cases. Iran has also recorded 245 cases.

The CHP strongly urged travellers and members of the public to stay alert and maintain strict hand, personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times as well as to keep appropriate social distance both locally and during travel to protect themselves from infectious diseases.

The public should also take heed of the health advice below when travelling outside Hong Kong:

- Avoid visiting hospitals. If it is necessary to visit a hospital, put on a surgical mask and observe strict personal and hand hygiene;
- Avoid touching animals (including game), poultry/birds or their droppings;
- Avoid visiting wet markets, live poultry markets or farms;
- Avoid making close contact with patients, especially those with symptoms of acute respiratory infections;
- Do not consume game meat and do not patronise food premises where game meat is served;
- Adhere to food safety and hygiene rules such as avoiding consuming raw or undercooked animal products, including milk, eggs and meat, or foods which may be contaminated by animal secretions, excretions (such as urine) or contaminated products, unless they have been properly cooked, washed or peeled;
- If feeling unwell when outside Hong Kong, especially if experiencing a fever or cough, wear a surgical mask, inform the hotel staff or tour escort and seek medical advice at once; and
- After returning to Hong Kong, consult a doctor promptly if experiencing a fever or other symptoms, take the initiative to inform the doctor of any recent travel history and any exposure to animals, and wear a surgical mask to help prevent spread of the disease.

For more information on COVID-19, the public may visit the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html). They can also visit the Travel Health Service's website (www.travelhealth.gov.hk/eindex.html) for the latest travel health advice.