

Government implements place-specific flight suspension mechanism in response to Omicron variant and tightens boarding and quarantine requirements for places with Omicron cases detected

The Government announced today (January 5) that in view of the rapidly worsening global pandemic situation due to the Omicron variant, it will, from 0.00am on January 8, implement the place-specific flight suspension mechanism for Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Government will also specify Cape Verde, Niger and South Sudan as Group A specified places to tighten the boarding and quarantine requirements for relevant inbound travellers.

Implementing place-specific flight suspension mechanism for eight places

The global pandemic situation has become exceptionally severe with the Omicron variant ravaging places overseas, while the number of new confirmed cases is continually reaching record highs. Currently, Hong Kong has already implemented very stringent measures to guard against the importation of cases, with the majority of overseas places already specified as high-risk Group A specified places, where non-Hong Kong residents are not allowed to enter Hong Kong or to come to Hong Kong via these places, and relevant arriving Hong Kong residents are subject to the most stringent quarantine and testing requirements to prevent the virus from entering the community. As the number of imported cases tested positive and carrying the Omicron variant has been continuously rising recently, and there are signs of local community transmission and spreading, the Government must implement more stringent inbound control measures to further reduce the number of persons arriving at Hong Kong from high risk places, so as to intercept the importation of cases.

With reference to inbound passenger traffic and the number of imported cases, the Government will, from 0.00am on January 8 (Hong Kong time) to January 21 (for 14 days), invoke the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to implement the place-specific flight suspension mechanism for Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. All passenger flights from these eight places will be prohibited from landing in Hong Kong, and at the same time, persons who have stayed in these places for more than two hours will be restricted from boarding passenger flights for Hong Kong, so as to stop

persons from the relevant places from travelling to Hong Kong via transit. The Government will review in due course whether the place-specific flight suspension mechanism should be lifted or continued by taking into account the latest global and local epidemic developments.

A Government spokesman said, "We understand that the place-specific flight suspension mechanism is an extremely stringent measure. As an international city, Hong Kong has all along seen large numbers of Hong Kong residents returning from these eight places, and so the relevant measure will inevitably affect the return journey of relevant Hong Kong residents. However, Hong Kong is at the moment facing the threat of a rapid deterioration of the local epidemic situation. We must act quickly and decisively to lower the risk to the local epidemic situation."

Tightening boarding and quarantine requirements for places with Omicron cases detected

Meanwhile, in view of the latest global developments of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, Cape Verde, Niger and South Sudan will be specified as Group A specified places from 0.00am on January 8 to tighten the boarding and quarantine requirements for relevant inbound travellers.

To manage and prevent the importation risks posed by Omicron cases, the Government will continue to employ the most stringent measures to guard against importation of cases. Overseas places where Omicron cases have been detected that may lead to local transmission and exportation of cases will be specified as Group A specified places. Noting that the detection of Omicron cases was confirmed in Cape Verde, Niger and South Sudan, the Government will specify them as Group A specified places from 0.00am on January 8. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed there within 21 days will not be allowed to enter Hong Kong. Hong Kong residents can only board a flight for Hong Kong if they have been fully vaccinated and hold a recognised vaccination record. They will have to undergo compulsory quarantine in a designated quarantine hotel for 21 days upon returning to Hong Kong, with six tests to be conducted during quarantine, followed by compulsory testing in a community testing centre on the 26th day of arrival in Hong Kong.

Details on the relevant boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements for respective specified places can be found at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/inbound-travel.html.

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under Cap. 599H to effect the above measures.