

Government tightens boarding and quarantine requirements for places with Omicron cases detected

The Government announced today (December 10) that in view of the latest global developments of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, Cuba, Kuwait and Liechtenstein will be specified as Group A specified places from 0.00am on December 13 to tighten the boarding and quarantine requirements for relevant inbound travellers. Meanwhile, in view of the detection under the "test-and-hold" arrangement at the airport of a case from the United States of America (the USA), a Group A specified place, that carried the Omicron variant, the Government will implement the most stringent quarantine and testing requirements for inbound travellers from the USA.

A Government spokesman stressed that the anti-epidemic strategy of guarding against the importation of cases and the resurgence of domestic infections is implemented strictly to attain the goal of dynamic "zero infection". Hong Kong has in place the most stringent inbound prevention and control measures in the world that enabled the successful prevention of the Omicron variant from entering the community. All five imported Omicron cases recorded so far were detected while the inbound travellers were undergoing stringent quarantine and testing measures. The relevant cases and their close contacts had been isolated immediately so that they would not have any contact with the community. Patients with COVID-19 infections are also required to undergo 14 days of compulsory quarantine even after they have recovered and fulfilled discharge criteria, such that the risk of viral transmission could be kept at the minimum. These measures are necessary in combating virus variants.

The Government announced earlier that as a preventive measure, the Government would specify places which have detected Omicron cases as Group A specified places. Noting that the detection of Omicron cases was confirmed in Cuba, Kuwait and Liechtenstein, the Government will specify them as Group A specified places from 0.00am on December 13. 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 (DQH) 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 at Hong Kong.

Additionally, a traveller arriving in Hong Kong from the USA, a Group A specified place, had been tested positive under the "test-and-hold" arrangement on arrival. The whole genome sequencing conducted by the Department Health's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed the case to be an Omicron case. The Government will implement the most stringent

quarantine and testing requirements for the relevant inbound travellers who arrive at Hong Kong on or after December 13 at 0.00am in view of the importation of an Omicron case from the USA into Hong Kong. Hong Kong residents who have stayed in the USA within 21 days are required to undergo compulsory quarantine at the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre for the first seven days upon their arrival at Hong Kong, during which they have to undergo daily tests and their health conditions will be monitored by healthcare professionals. They would then be transferred by designated transport to finish the remaining 14 days of compulsory quarantine at the DQH which they have reserved before coming to Hong Kong. They are still required to undergo frequent testing during quarantine there, followed by another compulsory testing in a community testing centre on the 26th day of arrival at Hong Kong. This quarantine and testing arrangement is currently applicable to inbound travellers from Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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 the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to effect the above measures.