

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (71) in DH CDB/9/12/6/4 Pt.1

31 December 2021

Dear Doctors,

**Appeal to offer coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) testing
for all symptomatic patients**

We would like to update you with the latest global and local situation of the Omicron variant, as well as solicit your continuous support to offer COVID-19 testing for all patients with acute symptoms irrespective of their travel history and clinical severity in order to identify infected persons in the community as early as possible.

The Omicron variant has been spreading at unprecedented rate globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as at 22 December 2021, Omicron has been identified in 110 countries across all six WHO Regions of which some have shown signs of community spread.

While more time and research is needed to fully grasp the epidemiological impact of the Omicron variant, preliminary data shows that the Omicron variant could be 4 to 8 times more transmissible than the Delta variant and the risk of re-infection could be 2 to 5 times higher when compared with wild type/ Delta variant. The protective effect of the 2-dose vaccine is also lower. Compared with infection by wild type SARS-CoV-2 virus, cough, fatigue, sore throat and body aches might be relatively common symptoms among Omicron cases, while loss of taste/ smell was less frequent. In addition, some patients may present with flu-like symptoms.

In Hong Kong, there has been an increasing number of imported cases of COVID-19 since mid-December. Omicron has also overtaken Delta as the main variant among the imported cases. As at 30 December 2021, a total of 81 Omicron cases have been identified in Hong Kong, and we have recorded two locally acquired import related cases epidemiologically linked with a confirmed case of Omicron occurring in a local restaurant. The



possibility of silent transmission and occurrence of further cases in the community cannot be excluded.

Testing of all symptomatic patients for COVID-19 remains one of the main strategies to early detect and contain any possible community spread. With the approaching of influenza season, it may be difficult to differentiate between COVID-19 and seasonal influenza based on symptomatology alone, and COVID-19 and influenza coinfections have also been reported overseas. We strongly urge doctors to remain vigilant and **arrange COVID-19 test for all patients presenting with any acute symptoms, irrespective of their travel history and clinical severity.**

Thank you again for your unfailing support and concerted efforts in the prevention and control of communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'SK CHUANG', is positioned below the closing text.

(Dr. SK CHUANG)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health