

To: Houston Chronicle, Seattle Post-Intelligencer and San Francisco Chronicle

April 8, 2020

Dear Editor,

On April 6, your paper carried a story about the COVID-19 situation in New York. The article mentioned that New York was going to keep its social-distancing measures in place because cities like Hong Kong made the mistake of restarting too quickly.

Building on the experience of handling SARS in 2003, Hong Kong responded swiftly to implement a comprehensive and coordinated approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health of the community while maintaining Hong Kong's position as an international city and aviation hub.

In terms of social distancing, we have suspended classes at all Hong Kong schools. Work from home arrangement has been implemented twice for Government employees, except for the essential public services. The Government also urges employers to make flexible work arrangements.

The Government requested the clubs on private recreational leases to close all of their recreational and sports facilities, changing rooms and play rooms for young children. Amusement game centers, bathhouses, fitness centers, bars, public entertainment such as cinemas are closed. Catering premises are required to implement various measures including limiting the number of customers to 50 percent of the normal seating; requiring a customer to wear a mask except when he/she is consuming food or drink on the premises. Body temperature screening is conducted before they enter the premises and hand sanitizers are provided. Since March 28, group gatherings of more than four people in public places are prohibited.

Yet, social distancing is only one of the many measures implemented. To stop further infection in the community as far as possible, Hong Kong actively conduct contact-tracing of all confirmed cases to identify possible infected people and do testing and quarantine as necessary. We also make public details of all cases (without personal information) to keep the community abreast of the situation.

From the very beginning, we advised the community to wear facial masks in public areas. We notice that this practice has now being recognized by the CDC as well as in other jurisdictions.

Starting from March 25, all non- Hong Kong residents, with a few exemptions, arriving from overseas countries and regions by plane are denied entry to Hong Kong. All travelers coming from Macao and Taiwan, including Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong residents will be subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine, which is the same as the arrangements for people entering from Mainland China.

A locally-developed smart bracelet connected to the user's smartphone is used in some cases to ensure people comply with quarantine requirements. Those placed under mandatory quarantine are subject to regular and surprise checks (phone calls, visits) to ensure they are at the intended place of quarantine.

As at close of April 8, the total number of cases was 961. For an international city with a population of 7.4 million in a crowded space of around 430 square miles, the incidence is considered low. The recent spike in the number of confirmed cases was mainly due to new cases with travel history.

Nonetheless, in the face of a pandemic, there is no place for complacency. Hong Kong will continue to face the challenge with three key principles: responding promptly, staying alert to the situation, and working in an open and transparent manner.

Sincerely,  
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