

Aug 23, 2021

Dear Editor,

Anjani Trivedi's articles "Hong Kong Chooses Fear Over Living With Covid" (17 August 2021) and "Hong Kong's Covid Policies Are Borderline Reckless" (18 August 2021) misrepresented Hong Kong's anti-epidemic efforts. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government makes the following points.

Public health is the paramount consideration for epidemic control in Hong Kong. Border control and social distancing measures are adjusted in tandem with the epidemic situation to reduce the risk of imported infections and transmission within the community, having regard to public health protection, economic impact on Hong Kong, and social acceptance. As a result, Hong Kong has one of the lowest incidences of, and deaths per capita from, COVID-19.

We have maintained clear communication to the public on our anti-epidemic strategy. The Chief Executive of the HKSAR has announced in April 2021 that we would adopt a new direction to fight the pandemic by adjusting social distancing and border control measures under the "vaccine bubble" concept and taking a more targeted approach in response to the aspirations of various sectors of the community to resume normal lives as soon as possible. It is apparent that the society is gradually returning to normal in an orderly manner in the past months. The fact that Hong Kong people never experienced a shutdown like the rest of the world during the pandemic, and that Hong Kong ranks the top in international study on our return to normalcy, speak for themselves.

Fully understanding that vaccination is the most effective and ultimate measure for preventing and controlling the pandemic, Hong Kong has launched a territory-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme since February, and the Hong Kong population has responded positively to the Government's call for vaccination. In the past two and a half months or so, the percentage of population which has received the 1<sup>st</sup> dose of vaccine more than doubled, increasing from 21% in early June to over 56% in mid-August. We have also been making COVID-19 vaccines freely available

for all our residents, including expatriates and consular corps. To say that Hong Kong is not putting efforts in vaccination is mistaken. On the contrary, Hong Kong's rate of vaccine uptake compares well with that of many developed countries, and our vaccination rate is expected to reach 70% by end-September, if the current pace of vaccination sustains.

For quarantine, your article stating that the quarantined have to get permission to open windows and, when they do, can't have them at more than a 45 degree angle is a misrepresentation of facts. Quarantined guests are not required to seek prior permission to open openable windows in their guest rooms and the angles to be opened are actually controlled by the design of the window. However, to avoid flow of air from hotel rooms to corridor thereby posing risk to other guests and hotel staff, the quarantined guests are required to close these openable windows whenever their room doors are open (e.g. for conducting COVID-19 test by government contractors, collection of meals, disposal of garbage). The Government has not imposed a requirement that quarantined guests should close their openable windows overnight.

Given the evolving nature of the pandemic, quarantine, tracing and testing policies and measures would have to adapt and change based on sound scientific background, to safeguard Hong Kong community from threat of COVID-19. The Government will continue to place the health of our community as a top priority and to be open and transparent about our anti-epidemic measures and efforts.

Professor Sophia Chan  
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