COVID-19: HONG KONG’S MULTI-PRONGED RESPONSE

OVERVIEW

The HKSAR Government has implemented a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of the community while maintaining Hong Kong’s position as an international city and aviation hub. The Government response is guided by three key principles: responding promptly, staying alert to the situation, and working in an open and transparent manner.

KEY FIGURES

INFECTION TRACKER

Latest figures available at Centre for Health Protection’s geospatial dashboard

VIRUS CONTAINMENT

Free testing services for patients attending 64 general out-patient clinics and 17 Accident and Emergency Departments under the Hospital Authority (HA), and all private clinics and hospitals

Targeted Group Testing Scheme introduced in phases since mid-July, 2020. As at February 2, a total of over 1,508,000 tests were performed under the scheme

A total of 19 community testing centres in operation to provide self-paid testing services at affordable price

Five community vaccination centres and 18 general out-patient clinics of the HA will provide COVID-19 vaccination to the public from February 26

Over 4,600 units in four operating quarantine centres

Quarantine facilities for residents of residential care homes in AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) and Pok Fu Lam

1,900-bed community treatment facility at AWE

North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre near AWE to provide negative pressure wards with about 820 beds

Over 10.3 million reusable masks and about 31 million locally-produced disposable masks distributed free-of-charge to the public
### SUPPORTING BUSINESS, PROTECTING JOBS

- Over $300 billion (US$38.5 billion) in relief measures – about 11% of GDP
- 10,000 civil servant and 5,000 short-term intern positions will be recruited in 2020-21
- 30,000 time-limited jobs worth $6 billion in public and private sectors within two years
- $81 billion Employment Support Scheme: $44 billion in wage subsidies approved under the first tranche, benefitting 1.95 million employees and over 150,000 employers; $37 billion approved under the second tranche as of October 21, 2020 for 1.56 million employees and over 135,000 employers
- $7,500 subsidy to 116,000 self-employed persons under the first tranche, and 10,000 persons under the second tranche as of October 21, 2020
- 16 types of support for specific sectors totalling $21 billion
- Additional support of nearly $600 million to further help the hard-hit tourism industry

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- $10,000 cash payout to each adult permanent resident
- 20% fare reduction by Mass Transit Railway (MTR) from July 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021. The Government will provide financial assistance to the MTR on a 50:50 matching basis.
- Monthly public transport expense threshold of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme relaxed from $400 to $200 between July 2020 and June 30, 2021
- 2-year deferral of student loan repayments
- 1-month rental payment for lower income tenants living in public rental units
- 3-month extension of payment deadline of salaries tax, tax under personal assessment and profits tax
The HKSAR Government has implemented a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of the community. The “Supress and Lift” strategy is constantly adjusted according to the actual situation and views from experts and stakeholders.

1. CONTAIN AND CONTROL

2. EARLY TESTING AND DETECTION

3. PREVENTING IMPORTED CASES

4. TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

1. CONTAIN AND CONTROL

EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

On January 4, 2020, the Government activated the “Serious Response Level” for the “Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance” (Preparedness and Response Plan).

On January 6, 2020, a Steering Committee was formed under the Preparedness and Response Plan.

On January 8, 2020, COVID-19 was included in the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance.

On January 23, 2020, the first quarantine centre was activated, immediately after the first two confirmed cases of infection in Hong Kong were identified.


The Chief Executive chairs the Steering Committee-Command Centre to oversee concerted efforts to fight the disease. First meeting held on January 26, 2020.
The Chief Executive set up an **expert advisory panel**, comprising four world-renowned experts, to advise the Government in a direct and timely manner.

The Government set up a **$30 billion (US$3.9 billion) Anti-epidemic Fund** to provide resources needed to fight the virus and ease the burden on people and businesses on **February 21, 2020**, and announced **two other rounds of $137.5 billion (US$17.6 billion) measures** on **April 8** and **$24 billion (US$3.07 billion) measures** on **September 16**, and a further injection of **$6.4 billion (US$81.5 million)** into the Fund on **December 17**.

**PROMOTING “SOCIAL DISTANCING”**

All kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (including special schools and schools offering non-local curriculum) and tutorial schools can arrange students to return to campuses in accordance with school-based arrangements on a half-day basis, capping at one-third of the total number of students. If an individual school can arrange all of its teachers and staff to take regular COVID-19 test, the Government will take into account the actual circumstances of the school and consider allowing it to arrange whole-school resumption of half-day face-to-face classes.

Until March 3, 2021, **social distancing rules** as follows:

- **Mandatory mask-wearing** in all public places, and when boarding or on board a public transport carrier, save for outdoor public places in country parks and special areas. Some exceptions apply, e.g. people engaging in strenuous physical activity outdoor

- **Group gatherings** reduced to 2 people in all public places

- For **catering premises**: No in-house dining from 10pm to 4.59am (**additional infection control measures apply**); the number of customers at any one time must not exceed 50% of the normal seating capacity; no more than 4 persons at one table (**additional infection control measures apply**); at least 1.5 metres or other partition arrangements between tables, etc.

- **Bars or pubs, bathhouses, party rooms, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, and swimming pools** must be **closed**

- Amusement game centres, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment, beauty parlours, massage establishments, club-houses and sports premises allowed to open, subject to certain infection control requirements and restrictions

- **Hotels and guesthouses** are required to impose restrictions on gathering activities and **strengthen infection control measures**, including limiting the number of persons in a room, suite, meeting room or function room, or number of participants for any religious or cultural ritual in relation to a wedding

  Events that attract large crowds **cancelled or postponed**.

**COVID-19 VACCINATION**

Being part of the two-pronged approach for the procurement of vaccines, the Government has joined the **COVID-19 vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX Facility)** led by the World Health Organization to procure vaccine doses for 35% of the population as a form of safety net to cater for the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society.
Having regard to scientific evidence and clinical data and in consultation with the relevant scientific committees and expert groups, the Government will pursue additional supplies through advance purchase agreements with individual vaccine developers. The goal is to procure sufficient doses to serve at least two times the population. The Government has procured about 22.5 million doses of vaccine from three vaccine developers. Negotiation with other vaccine developers on procurement arrangements will continue.

The Government has made a regulation to provide the legal framework for bringing in vaccines that satisfy the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality for emergency use, and planned to set up an indemnity fund to provide support for members of the public who encounter a rare or unpredicted severe adverse event associated with the administration of the vaccine. An expert committee has also been set up to continuously monitor the possible adverse event following administration of the vaccines, and provide professional views and suggestions on safety monitoring of the authorised vaccines.

According to the expert advice, and taking into account the supply situation of the vaccines, priority vaccination will be arranged for the groups below:

- Healthcare staff and staff involved in anti-epidemic work
- Persons aged 60 or above (A maximum of 2 carers who accompany elderly people aged 70 or above can also receive vaccination)
- Residents and staff of residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities
- People providing essential public services
- People providing cross-boundary transportation or working at control points and ports

Members of the public can receive vaccination in 29 community vaccination centres (CVCs) spanning across all districts, over 1,200 private doctors of more than 1,500 clinics participating in the programme, 18 general out-patient clinics of the HA, and residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities.

CVCs will commence operation in phases. Private clinics participating in the programme are expected to administer vaccine before mid-March. Outreach vaccination teams will also be arranged to provide vaccination to residents of residential care homes and nursing homes.

From February 23, the vaccination programme will open for online appointments. The priority groups can receive vaccine at 5 community vaccination centres and 18 general out-patient clinics of the HA from February 26. If necessary, assistance for making online bookings can be sought from post offices or public housing estate management offices.

The Government has launched a designated website to provide information about the vaccines and vaccination on a one-stop basis. The website will be linked to the online booking system.

**ENHANCED QUARANTINE ARRANGEMENTS AND ISOLATION AND TREATMENT FACILITIES**

People who are close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases, but are asymptomatic, will be placed under compulsory quarantine at dedicated quarantine centres.

A locally developed smart bracelet connected to the user’s smartphone will be used to ensure people comply with quarantine requirements.

Those placed under mandatory quarantine will be subject to regular and surprise checks (phone calls, visits) to ensure they are at the intended place of quarantine.
Over 4,600 units in four operating quarantine centres, namely the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in Chai Wan, the Penny’s Bay Quarantine Centre on Lantau Island, the Silka Tsuen Wan in Kwai Chung, and the Dorsett Kwun Tong.

Temporary accommodation facility at Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre for Hong Kong residents under compulsory quarantine who are unable to arrange accommodation.

Quarantine facilities have been set up for residents of residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities at AWE and the Hong Kong PHAB Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp in Pok Fu Lam.

A community treatment facility has been set up in AWE with about 1,900 beds to admit patients with clinically suitable condition between the ages of 18 to 60 when needed.

The North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre near AWE, which will open on February 26 in phases, provides negative pressure wards with about 820 beds.

BOOSTING SUPPLY OF SURGICAL MASKS

The Government introduced the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme to help address the shortage of masks as well as to build up stock. As of January 31, 2021, all 20 subsidised production lines collectively delivered over 288 million masks to the Government, including about 31 million masks that were distributed to the public.

Locally developed reusable masks were distributed free to all Hong Kong citizens, except babies and infants.

2. EARLY TESTING AND DETECTION

The Government follows the three key principles of “compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, targeted testing on an obligatory basis and testing on a voluntary basis” to conduct large-scale COVID-19 testing for groups of different risks with a view to achieving “early identification, early isolation and early treatment”, and cutting the transmission chains in the community as far as possible.

From March 9, 2020, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) extended the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme, which provides free virus testing service, to cover all private clinics and hospitals so that cases of COVID-19 can be identified early in order to minimise the risk of community transmission. A total of 64 general out-patient clinics and 17 Accident and Emergency Departments under the HA are covered by the Programme.
Public hospitals will conduct COVID-19 testing for inpatients.

Individuals who perceive themselves to have higher risk of exposure and experience mild discomfort can obtain specimen collection packs free of charge for testing at 47 HA general out-patient clinics, 121 post offices or vending machines at 20 MTR stations.

Since mid-July 2020, testing for high-risk groups has been provided through the Targeted Group Testing Scheme (TGTS). Testing is also arranged on a regular basis or by random sampling for certain targeted groups depending on risk assessment and anti-epidemic needs. As at February 2, a total of over 1,508,000 tests were performed under TGTS.

The Universal Community Testing Programme, launched between September 1 and 14, 2020, provided free testing service of COVID-19 to members of the public who could participate on a voluntary basis. A total of about 1,783,000 specimens were tested.

Nineteen community testing centres across the territory were set up to provide self-paid testing services at a price capped at $240 to the general community. The Government will conduct testing for the public at the testing centres for public health reasons when necessary.

Certain categories of persons will be required to undergo compulsory COVID-19 testing under relevant regulation. Specified medical practitioners under the regulation can also require symptomatic patients to undergo testing.

According to the needs of infection control, the Government may restrict movement of persons subject to compulsory testing, or seal off premises with epidemic outbreaks until all persons on the premises have undergone testing and the test results are ascertained by making a “restriction-testing declaration”. The declaration will cover a period of at most 7 days.

A website has been set up to facilitate members of the public to download their own electronic COVID-19 testing records from the test services provided by the Department of Health, the HA and community testing centres.

Free “LeaveHomeSafe” COVID-19 exposure notification mobile app was launched to encourage the public to voluntarily keep a more precise record of their whereabouts, minimising the risk of further transmission of the virus.

3. PREVENTING IMPORTED CASES

From February 4, 2020, the Government closed all but two land boundary control points (Shenzhen Bay and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) with the Mainland to stem the flow of cross-boundary travel. All ferry services to and from the Mainland and Macao were suspended. Entry points at Shenzhen Bay, HZMB as well as Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) remain open with customs and health monitoring resources concentrated at these entry points.

Immigration services at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Ocean Terminal are suspended.

All non-Hong Kong residents arriving from overseas countries and regions by plane have been denied entry to Hong Kong since March 25, 2020. Non-Hong Kong residents arriving from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan who have visited any overseas countries and regions in the past 14 days are denied entry to Hong Kong.

All arrivals at HKIA are required to take a COVID-19 test. They are required to wait for test results before leaving.
Inbound travellers who have been to **Beijing, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanghai or Shanxi** in the past 14 days arriving via land boundary control points are required to collect their deep throat saliva samples for COVID-19 testing.

**All inbound travellers**, including Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong residents, are subject to **compulsory quarantine** to a maximum of 28 days (apart from persons exempted under relevant regulations). Currently, arrivals who have stayed in places outside China in the past 21 days will be subject to a 21-day quarantine. Other travellers will be subject to a 14-day quarantine.

For **persons arriving at Hong Kong from places outside China**, in addition to the test upon arrival, they have to undergo two other tests at day 12 of the quarantine period, and on the 19th or 20th day following their arrival.

An inbound traveller who, on the day on which the traveller boarded a civil aviation aircraft that arrives at, or is about to arrive at Hong Kong, or during the 21 days before that day, has stayed in any specified **very high-risk place** (i.e. Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Ecuador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States), must provide documents including proof of negative result of nucleic acid test for COVID-19 with sample taken within 72 hours before departure, confirmation proof of room reservation in a hotel, etc.

**Crew change arrangement** for all passenger vessels and goods vessels without cargo operations **suspended** since July 29, 2020.

From February 20, testing and isolation arrangements for **air crew members, sea crew members of goods vessels coming to Hong Kong for cargo operations** and other persons exempted from compulsory quarantine arriving Hong Kong, including **consular and diplomatic officers**, will be further tightened.

Except persons in transit or exempted from compulsory quarantine, an inbound traveller who, on the day on which the traveller boarded a specified aircraft, or during the 21 days before that day, has stayed outside China, must provide confirmation of hotel room reservation for not less than 21 days starting on the day of the arrival, stay in a designated quarantine hotel and must not allow visitors during compulsory quarantine. **Dedicated transportation** will be arranged to send travellers to the designated quarantine hotels from the airport or the Holding Centre for Test Result.

All persons who have stayed in Brazil, Ireland, South Africa or the United Kingdom for more than 2 hours in the past 21 days (including Hong Kong residents) will not be allowed to board flights for Hong Kong until further notice.

**Hong Kong residents returning from Guangdong Province or Macao**, upon fulfilment of specified conditions, including not having been to places other than Hong Kong, Guangdong Province or Macao in the past 14 days, holding a negative nucleic acid test result, etc., could be **exempted from compulsory quarantine**.

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### 4. TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

**Briefings** are held to regularly update the media and the public on latest situation and measures

Dedicated **website** with useful information and updates on latest developments

**Publicity campaigns** to disseminate personal hygiene messages through online and offline media are run in a number of ethnic minority languages apart from English and Chinese.

**“Tamar Talk” Facebook page** provides information and clarifies rumours
USEFUL LINKS

- Website on the Fight Against the Coronavirus
- COVID-19 Vaccination Programme designated website
- CHP’s geospatial dashboard on COVID-19
- BrandHK COVID-19 Update Page
- Booklet on HKSARG Economic Relief Measures
- Hospital Authority Patient Designated Website – Walk with Us – Combat COVID - 19
- WHO Coronavirus website
- University of Hong Kong dashboard on COVID-19 (with real-time effective reproductive number)