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. The Government has also adopted a new direction in fighting the pandemic to restore the city to normality in a gradual and orderly manner, and aim to achieve the goal by refraining from using a “stop and go” approach, reinforcing infection control measures in a targeted manner and reiterating the need for concerted community efforts. Social distancing measures will be adjusted with the concept of “vaccine bubble” as the basis.

KEY FIGURES

INFECTION TRACKER

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

VIRUS CONTAINMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Free testing services for patients attending general out-patient clinics and 17 Accident and Emergency Departments under the Hospital Authority (HA), and all private clinics and hospitals</td>
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<td>Targeted Group Testing Scheme introduced in phases since mid-July 2020</td>
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<td>A total of 21 community testing centres in operation to provide self-paid testing services at affordable price</td>
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<td>Twenty-nine community vaccination centres (CVCs) and 21 general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) of the HA are providing COVID-19 vaccination to the public.</td>
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<td>About 1,830,800 doses of COVID-19 vaccines administered since the implementation of the vaccination scheme on February 26, 2021</td>
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<td>Over 4,600 units in 4 operating quarantine centres</td>
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<td>Quarantine facilities for residents of residential care homes in AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) and Pok Fu Lam</td>
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<td>1,000-bed community treatment facility at AWE</td>
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<td>North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre near AWE provides negative pressure wards with 816 beds</td>
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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**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Over $300 billion (US$38.5 billion) of relief measures – about 11% of GDP – via the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) and in the 2020-21 Budget</td>
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<td>Further measures of about $9.5 billion (US$1.2 billion) in the 2021-22 Budget to support enterprises</td>
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<td>In 2020-21, about 31,000 time-limited jobs were created in the public and private sectors through the AEF. Further $6.6 billion will be allocated to create around 30,000 time-limited jobs in 2021-22</td>
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<td>16 types of support for specific sectors totalling $21 billion</td>
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<td>Additional support of nearly $600 million to further help the hard-hit tourism industry</td>
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<td>One more allowance round of about $400 million under AEF to support 6 types of premises that have been closed for business for a relatively long period of time</td>
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**COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

In the 2021-22 Budget, a series of relief measures was announced, including:

- Reducing salaries tax and tax under personal assessment
- Providing a rate concession for domestic properties
- Granting a subsidy to residential electricity accounts
- Giving eligible recipients an extra half-month’s standard payment allowance for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, Old Age Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance or Disability Allowance
- Paying the examination fees for school candidates taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

Monthly public transport expense threshold of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme relaxed from $400 to $200 between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021, and, starting from April, the monthly subsidy cap of the Scheme temporarily raised to $500

2-year deferral of student loan repayments
“SUPPRESS AND LIFT” STRATEGY

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 two-thirds 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. **From May 24, all schools may fully resume face-to-face classes on a half-day basis.**

Until May 26, 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** of not more than 4 people in all public places unless exempted
- **For catering premises**, 4 operating modes:
  - **Type A**: Dine-in services can be provided from 5am to 5.59pm; number of customers at any one time not exceeding 50% of the normal seating capacity and no more than 2 persons at one table (**additional infection control measures apply**)
  - **Type B**: Dine-in services can be provided from 5am to 9.59pm; number of customers at any one time not exceeding 50% of the normal seating capacity and no more than 4 persons at one table; patrons (excluding those only order takeaways) must scan the “LeaveHomeSafe” QR code with their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of visits before entering the premises (**additional infection control measures apply**)
  - **Type C**: All staff must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Within “Designated Zone C” of the premises, dine-in services can be provided from 5am to 11.59pm, with number of customers at any one time not exceeding 50% of the normal seating capacity and no more than 6 persons at one table, and all customers in the zone must scan the “LeaveHomeSafe” QR code with their mobile phones (**additional infection control measures apply**)
  - **Type D**: All staff must have completed the full course of COVID-19 vaccination. Within “Designated Zone D” of the premise, dine-in services can be provided from 5am to 1.59am, with the number of customers at any one time not exceeding 75% of the normal seating capacity and no more than 8 persons at one table, and all customers in the zone must have received the first COVID-19 vaccine dose and scan the “LeaveHomeSafe” QR code with their mobile phones (**additional infection control measures apply**)
- **Bars or pubs, amusement game centres, bathhouses, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment, party rooms, beauty parlours, massage establishments, club-houses, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, sports premises and swimming pools 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.

• Licensed travel agents are allowed to organise tours of not more than 30 persons (including staff). The frontline staff must have received the first COVID-19 vaccine dose, or submit a declaration form and a medical certificate of being unfit to receive vaccination for health reasons and undergo testing 7 days prior to a group tour.

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 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.

Hong Kong residents aged 16 or above can make appointments for vaccinations. Currently, vaccinations are provided in 29 CVCs, clinics of over 1,600 private doctors participating in the programme and 21 GOPCs of the HA. Outreach vaccination teams are being arranged to provide vaccination to residents of residential care homes and nursing homes in an orderly manner.

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 4 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 1,000 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 has opened in phases from February 26, providing negative pressure wards with 816 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 March 31, 2021, all 20 subsidised production lines collectively delivered over 372 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. 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. Testing is also arranged on a regular basis or by random sampling for certain targeted groups depending on risk assessment and anti-epidemic needs.

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.

Twenty-one 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.

Non-Hong Kong residents will be allowed entry to Hong Kong if they have only stayed in low-risk places or places in China (including the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan) on the day of arrival and during the 14 days before that day. They will be subject to the respective boarding and quarantine requirements applicable to extreme high-risk, very high-risk, high-risk or medium-risk places if they have stayed in those places on the day of boarding for/arrival at Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day. Other non-Hong Kong residents arriving from overseas countries and regions by plane will be denied entry to Hong Kong (exemptions apply).
All persons who have stayed in any specified extremely high-risk place (i.e. Brazil, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and South Africa) for more than 2 hours on the day of boarding for/arrival at Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day will not be allowed to board flights for Hong Kong. Persons who returned to Hong Kong from the extremely high-risk places and very high-risk places (i.e. Ireland and the United Kingdom) need to provide negative result proof of a COVID-19 test conducted within 72 hours before the schedule time of departure and, after completing a 21-day compulsory quarantine in a designated quarantine hotel, self-monitor for 7 days and be subject to 4 tests during quarantine and compulsory testing on day 26 of their arrival.

Person who have stayed in any specified high-risk place (i.e. Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the United States) on the day of boarding for/arrival at Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day must provide negative result proof of a COVID-19 test conducted within 72 hours before the schedule time of departure. Arrivals, who have stayed in the high-risk places and medium-risk places (i.e. all places, except China, which are not extremely high-risk, very high-risk, high-risk or low-risk places) and have not been fully vaccinated, are subject to a 21-day quarantine in a designated quarantine hotel and 4 tests during quarantine. For those who have been fully vaccinated, they are subject to a 14-day quarantine, self-monitoring in the subsequent 7 days, 3 tests during quarantine and compulsory testing on days 16 and 19 of their arrival.

Arrivals, who have stayed in specified low-risk places (i.e. Australia, New Zealand and Singapore) on the day of boarding for/arrival at Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day and have not been fully vaccinated, are subject to a 14-day quarantine, self-monitoring for the subsequent 7 days, 3 tests during quarantine and compulsory testing on days 16 and 19 of their arrival. For those who have been fully vaccinated, they are subject to a 7-day compulsory quarantine, self-monitoring in the subsequent 7 days, 2 tests during quarantine and compulsory testing on day 12 of their arrival.

Hong Kong residents returning from the Mainland or Macao, upon fulfilment of specified conditions, including not having been to places outside Hong Kong, the Mainland or Macao and places in the Mainland that were designated as "medium-risk" and "high-risk" in the past 14 days, holding a negative nucleic acid test result, etc., could be exempted from compulsory quarantine under the Return2hk Scheme.

Travellers arriving from places in China, including those placed under compulsory quarantine or exempted from quarantine under the Return2hk Scheme, must undergo testing on arrival/day 2 and on day 12 following their arrivals. They are subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine at home if they did not return under the Return2hk Scheme. The compulsory quarantine period for fully vaccinated persons will be shortened to 7 days, with a subsequent 7-day self-monitoring period.

In mid-May, the Come2hk Scheme is planned to be launched for non-Hong Kong residents in Guangdong and Macao, upon fulfilment of specified conditions, to enter Hong Kong without being subject to quarantine.

From May 26, travellers of designated flights between Hong Kong and Singapore under the Air Travel Bubble arrangement will not be subject to quarantine on the condition that they comply with a set of anti-epidemic measures.

**All arrivals at HKIA are required to take a COVID-19 test.** They are required to wait for test results before leaving.

**Crew change arrangement** for all passenger vessels and goods vessels without cargo operation 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**, have been further tightened.
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**
- Hong Kong-Singapore Air Travel Bubble dedicated 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)