

Hong Kong's multi-pronged response to COVID-19

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, with actions that are guided by **three key principles**: responding promptly, staying alert to the situation, and working in an open and transparent manner. The Government will continue to listen to the views of the experts and various sectors and adjust the various epidemic control measures in a gradual and orderly manner under the "suppress and lift" strategy according to the actual development of the epidemic situation, while considering the impact of the measures on the economy, livelihood and the daily lives of people.

Emergency arrangements

- On **January 4**, 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**, a **Steering Committee was formed** under the Preparedness and Response Plan.
- On **January 8**, COVID-19 was included in the **Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance**.
- On **January 23**, the **first quarantine centre was activated**, immediately after the first two confirmed cases of infection in Hong Kong were identified.
- On **January 25**, the Government activated the "**Emergency Response Level**" of the Preparedness and Response Plan.
- The Chief Executive Carrie Lam chairs the **Steering Committee-Command Centre** to oversee concerted efforts to fight the disease. First meeting held on January 26.
- The Chief Executive has 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** on **February 21**, 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** to provide resources needed to fight the virus and ease the burden on people and businesses.

Reducing the flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland

- On **January 24**, **flights and high speed rail services between Hong Kong and Wuhan were suspended**.
- On **January 25**, the Government announced expanding the arrangements of **health declaration by in-coming travellers from the Mainland** to all boundary control points (BCPs).
- Since **January 28**, the Mainland authorities have **suspended** the application, approval and issuance of the group visit endorsements and the endorsements under the **Individual Visit Scheme for Mainland residents** visiting Hong Kong.
- From **January 30**, **flights** between Hong Kong and other Mainland cities have been **reduced by about half in stages**. **All rail services** of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Intercity Through Train were **suspended**.
- From **February 1**, Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) implemented **body temperature checks** for **departing passengers** (in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) advice) in addition to temperature checks for **all incoming passengers**. Those with fever are prevented from boarding until cleared.
- From **February 4**, the Government **closed all but two land BCPs** (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 **HKIA remain open** with customs and health monitoring resources concentrated at these entry points.
- On **February 5**, immigration services at **Kai Tak Cruise Terminal** and **Ocean Terminal** were **suspended**.
- Since **February 7**, the Mainland authorities have suspended the processing of the **business visit endorsements** for Mainland residents to travel to Hong Kong.
- From **April 3**, the **operating hours of the passenger clearance services** at the **Shenzhen Bay Port** have been **adjusted to run from 10am to 8pm daily**. The operating hours for cargo clearance remain unchanged (i.e. from 6:30am to midnight daily).
- From **April 5**, the operating hours of **clearance for cross-boundary coaches and shuttle buses passengers at the HZMB Hong Kong Port** have been shortened to run **from 10am to 8pm daily**, and the operating hours of the **clearance for private cars** have been shortened to run **from 6am to 10pm daily**. The operating hours for cargo clearance remain unchanged (i.e. 24 hours daily).

Preventing imported cases

- The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) strongly urges members of the public to **avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong**.
- From **March 8**, the health declaration arrangements at HKIA were expanded to all flights arriving Hong Kong.
- From **March 25**, **all non-Hong Kong residents** arriving from overseas countries and regions **by plane** will be **denied entry** to Hong Kong until further notice.
- **Non-Hong Kong residents** arriving from **the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan** who have visited any overseas countries and regions in the past 14 days will be **denied entry** to Hong Kong until further notice.
- **All inbound travellers**, including Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong residents, **are subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine** (apart from persons exempted under relevant regulations).
- All arrivals at HKIA are required to immediately collect their deep throat saliva sample for taking a COVID-19 test at the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) in the Midfield Concourse of HKIA.
- **All asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving at HKIA are required to wait for test results** before leaving. Passengers arriving by flights in mornings will stay at TSCC to wait for test results, while those who need to wait for test results overnight will be temporarily accommodated in the Department of Health (DH) Holding Centre for Test Result at Dorsett Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong.
- 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 14 days before that day, has stayed in any specified **very high-risk place** (i.e. Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Africa, the United States, and, from October 1, the United Kingdom), 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.
- From **July 29**, crew change arrangement for all passenger vessels and goods vessels without cargo operation has been suspended. All air crew and incoming sea crew members of goods vessels coming to Hong Kong for cargo operation arriving at the HKIA must obtain a negative result of nucleic acid test for COVID-19 conducted at a recognised laboratory within 48 hours prior to boarding. They must also submit a deep throat saliva specimen at the TSCC upon arrival to Hong Kong for testing purpose. All incoming sea crew members and those air crew members who do not possess negative test results must wait at the TSCC or other designated location until their test results are confirmed negative. Airlines and shipping companies/agents must arrange point-to-point transfer for the air crew and sea crew members and the use of public transportation which will serve the general public at the same time is prohibited. Incoming and outgoing sea crew members must only travel between the vessels and HKIA and should not go into the community. As for air crew members, they must self-isolate at their hotel rooms or at home in accordance with the requirements.

As a result of the above measures, the **number of arrivals** in Hong Kong via all control points (including airport) has **dropped significantly**. (Total arrivals on January 1 were 421,844; on January 15 they were 372,755; on January 31 they had dropped to 140,859. By February 4 they had further dropped to 69,812 and on September 24 the number was 1,626.)

The Government has introduced a mechanism to empower the Secretary for Food and Health to specify two categories of places under the relevant compulsory quarantine regulations for arrivals into Hong Kong. Persons coming from Category 1 specified places are subject to compulsory quarantine arrangements, while those from Category 2 are excluded from the arrangements subject to meeting certain conditions. All places in China outside Hong Kong and all places outside China are specified as Category 1 places with effect from June 5.

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 in some cases 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.
- Contravening the quarantine requirement would be a **criminal offence**. Offenders are subject to a **maximum fine of HK\$25,000 and imprisonment for six months**. The relevant departments will step up inspections and adopt "zero tolerance" towards those contravening the quarantine order. Immediate prosecution will be taken without any warning.
- The public can make use of the "[e-Report Room](#)" to report suspected cases of breaching quarantine orders.

- Currently, there are three operating quarantine centres, namely **JPC Permanent Activity Centre and Integrated Youth Training Camp** in **Pat Heung, Yuen Long, Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre**, and **Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre Phase I** on **Lantau Island** providing over 1,000 units. Two temporary accommodation facilities offered by the Government, Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre and Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, have also been made available for persons under compulsory quarantine who are unable to arrange accommodation.
- A **quarantine facility for residents of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs)** in AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) has begun operation by phases since end-July, with a total of 640 beds. In addition, two quarantine centres for residents of residential homes at Hong Kong PHAB Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp in Pok Fu Lam and Cheung Muk Tau Holiday Centre for the Elderly in Sai Kung have also been activated.
- The Hospital Authority (HA) has set up a **community isolation facility** at the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village with over 300 en-suite units. The facility started admitting appropriate recovering patients with stable condition from July 24.
- A **community treatment facility (CTF)** set up by the HA in AWE commenced operation on **August 1**. The facility has 900 beds to admit patients with clinically suitable condition from the age of 18 to 60. The Government is expanding the CTF in AWE to add about 1,000 beds.
- The Government is planning to construct a temporary hospital near AWE to provide negative pressure wards with over 800 beds and relevant medical equipment.

Enhancing testing for COVID-19

- **Rapid testing** is available in **public hospital** laboratories to shorten the waiting time for test results.
- From **March 9**, the CHP extended the **Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme**, which provides a free testing service for COVID-19, 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.
- From **March 29**, the CHP further extended the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme to cover **all asymptomatic inbound travellers** arriving from all places under the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation.
- From **April 3**, participants of the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme can make use of a **door-to-door specimen collection service** from member companies of the Cyberport Startup Alumni Association to submit their deep throat saliva specimens to the DH for COVID-19 testing.
- From **April 20**, all asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving at HKIA are provided with a container for collecting their **deep throat saliva sample for another round of virus testing** during the compulsory quarantine.
- From **May 12**, public hospitals will conduct COVID-19 testing for inpatients with influenza-like illness symptoms. Admission screening is conducted for a random sample of institutional residents and patients admitted to psychiatric wards.
- From **May 15**, DH sets up a service point at HKIA to provide containers to airport workers for collecting their deep throat saliva samples for testing of COVID-19.
- **Since mid-July**, 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, including high-risk groups such as staff of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes; staff of critical infrastructure and services, such as slaughterhouse workers, designated frontline container terminal employees; and high-exposure groups such as public transport drivers, frontline staff of catering businesses, stall operators and personnel working in markets. As at September 17, a total of 499,000 specimens were tested under the TGTS.
- Individuals who perceive themselves to have higher risk of exposure and experience mild discomfort can collect specimen collection packs free of charge for COVID-19 testing at 31 general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) of the HA. The number of GOPCs distributing specimen collection packs will increase to 46 from September 28, covering clinics in various outlying islands.
- From **August 6**, inbound travellers who have been to **Xinjiang or Liaoning in the past 14 days** arriving via land BCPs (Shenzhen Bay Port and the HZMB) are required to collect their deep throat saliva sample for COVID-19 testing.
- The **Universal Community Testing Programme**, running from **September 1 to 14** provided a one-off free testing service of COVID-19 to members of the public. A total of about 1,783,000 specimens were tested.

Promoting "social distancing" to prevent the spread of COVID-19

- Face-to-face classes in this school year are held on a half-day basis for the time being and are resuming in two phases. The first phase started on September 23. The second phase will start on September 29.
- The 2020 Legislative Council General Election is postponed to September 5, 2021
- The 2020 National Day Fireworks Display originally scheduled to be held at Victoria Harbour on October 1 is cancelled.
- The Government will continue to **cancel or postpone events** that attract large crowds.
- Until **October 1**, catering premises are required to implement measures to promote social distancing: **no selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises from 0.00am to 4.59am, except specific premises; the number of customers at the premises at any one time must not exceed 50% of the normal seating capacity; no more than four persons at one table; at least 1.5 metres between tables** is maintained or other partition arrangements are made; **a person must wear a mask** except when consuming food or drink on the premises; **body temperature screening** of persons entering the premises is conducted and **hand sanitisers are provided**; etc. **Live performance and dancing must not be allowed** in any catering premises.
- Subject to certain infection control requirements and restrictions, **premises commonly known as bars or pubs, amusement game centres, bathhouses, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment, "party rooms" for hire for holding social gatherings, beauty parlours, massage establishments, club-houses, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, sports premises, and swimming pools** are allowed to **open**. The measure will be in effect until **October 1**. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.
- Starting from October 1, **performance with live audience** may resume in some places of public entertainment subject to the latest requirements and restrictions and the adoption of sufficient epidemic prevention measures.
- Group gatherings of **more than four people in public places are prohibited** apart from gatherings exempted under relevant regulation. The prohibition will remain in force until **October 1**. Offenders are liable to a maximum penalty \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months.
- Until **October 1**, a person **must wear a mask at all times** when he or she is **boarding or on board a public transport carrier**, or is **entering or present in an MTR paid area and all indoor or outdoor public places**, save for outdoor public places in country parks and special areas. Some exceptions apply. If a person does not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement, an authorised person may deny that person from boarding a public transport carrier or entering the area concerned, as well as require that person to wear a mask and leave. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$5,000.

Facilitating the return of Hong Kong residents from COVID-19 hotspots

- Between **February 19 and 23**, for Hong Kong **passengers on board the Diamond Princess** cruise ship in Japan, the Government arranged three free chartered flights to bring a total of 193 Hong Kong residents who had tested negative for COVID-19, back to Hong Kong. After their arrival at Hong Kong, they were taken to the quarantine centre in Chun Yeung Estate for quarantine observation for 14 days.
- The Government arranged eight chartered flights to take a total of 1,027 Hong Kong residents stranded in **Hubei Province** back to Hong Kong on **March 4, 5, 25 and 26**. After their arrival at Hong Kong, they were required to undergo compulsory quarantine for 14 days.
- **Peru** has declared a state of emergency and imposed strict restrictions on all land and air traffic. **A chartered flight** was arranged on **April 3** to fly Hong Kong residents from Lima to London, followed by a connecting flight with secured flight bookings back to Hong Kong. **The costs were borne by the users**. 65 Hong Kong residents took the chartered flight and arrived in Hong Kong on **April 5**. They were required to undergo 14 days of compulsory quarantine.
- **Pakistan and India** have banned all international flights since late March. A chartered flight from **Islamabad** was arranged on **April 30** for the return of 319 Hong Kong residents stranded in **Pakistan**. Two flights from **New Delhi** and **Mumbai** were also arranged to bring about 570 Hong Kong residents stranded in **India** back on **May 18** and **June 4** respectively. In addition, the Government arranged two special flights - from **Bengaluru (June 18)** and **Chennai (June 20)**, to bring a total of about 280 passengers back to Hong Kong from India. **The costs were borne by the users**. They were transferred to designated quarantine centres for a 14-day compulsory quarantine upon arrival.
- **Nepal** has imposed strict restrictions on all land and air traffic since late March. Two special flights from Kathmandu were arranged on **June 1** to assist the return of about 330 Hong Kong residents stranded in Nepal. The flights arrived in Hong Kong on **June 2**. **The costs were borne by the users**. They were transferred to Chun Yeung Estate for a 14-day compulsory quarantine after arrival.

Boosting supply of surgical masks

- To meet high demand, the Government is taking a **multi-pronged approach** to increase the supply of surgical masks including **sourcing globally, increasing local production**, and liaising with relevant Mainland authorities to facilitate speedy clearance and delivery to Hong Kong.
- **Priorities** include meeting the **needs of healthcare workers** and other **personnel providing services to the public**, as well as stabilising the market supply.
- The Government introduced the **Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme** to help address the shortage of masks as well as to build up stock. On April 24, all 20 subsidised production lines under the scheme were approved. As of July 31, the 20 production lines collectively delivered over 56 million masks to the Government, including about 28 million masks that were distributed to the public.
- The Chief Executive announced on March 21 that **two million surgical masks** are to be provided **monthly** to RCHEs and RCHDs for use by the nursing staff.
- **Locally developed reusable masks** are distributed **free to all Hong Kong citizens**, except babies and infants. A total of about 5.9 million reusable masks were distributed in the first round. Free delivery of the second reusable mask to eligible citizens who registered online in the first round started from September 14. Upon completion of the second round of delivery, citizens who have not collected the mask may collect it at the designated collection points starting early October.
- On August 7, the Government announced that about 28 million locally-produced masks were distributed to about 2.8 million residential addresses, with each household receiving 10 masks.

Procuring COVID-19 vaccines

- The Government announced on September 4 that it had submitted the expression of interest to **participate in the COVID-19 vaccine Global Access Facility**, being part of Hong Kong's two-pronged strategy for procurement of vaccines.
- DH is trying to learn more about the situation of research and development as well as preparation for production of vaccines in other places (including the Mainland), so as to facilitate study and discussion by the scientific committees. Having regard to scientific evidence and clinical data and in consultation with the relevant scientific committees, the Government will **pursue additional supplies through Advance Purchase Agreements with individual vaccine developers**.

Transparent communication with the public

- **Daily briefings** are held to regularly **update the media and the public** on the latest developments, including the number of cases and new measures related to COVID-19.
- **Press conferences** are held by **senior officials** to announce major government decisions and anti-epidemic measures etc.
- The Government has launched [a 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](#) has been launched to provide information and clarify rumours using simple and easy-to-understand text and data.

(Revision date: September 25, 2020)

SEPTEMBER 2020