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 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.

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, the novel coronavirus 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 another round of $137.5 billion (US$17.6 billion) measures on April 8 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.
- From January 27, Hubei residents and those who have visited Hubei Province in the past 14 days (except Hong Kong residents) are barred from entering Hong Kong.
- 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, HKIA implemented body temperature checks for departing passengers (in line with 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 boundary control points (Shenzhen Bay and Hong Kong-Zhuai-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.
- 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 transit services at HKIA suspended 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).
- From April 8, all arrivals at HKIA are required to immediately collect their deep throat saliva sample for taking a COVID-19 test at the nearby Temporary Specimen Collection Centre (TSCC) in AsiaWorld-Expo.
- From April 9, asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving on flights from the UK are required to await COVID-19 test results before leaving TSCC. All travellers from the US and Europe and those arriving on other flights landing in mornings are required to wait for the test results, effective from April 13 and April 19 respectively.
- From April 22, 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 Holding Centre for Test Result at the Regal Oriental Hotel.

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 April 23 the number was 696).

**Enhanced quarantine arrangements for people at risk of carrying the infection**

- 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 four operating quarantine centres, namely Chun Yeung Estate in Fo Tan, the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in Chai Wan, the Heritage Lodge at the Jao Tsung-I Academy in Lai Chi Kok, and JPC Permanent Activity Centre and Integrated Youth Training Camp in Pat Heung, Yuen Long, providing about 1,700 units. Three temporary accommodation facilities offered by the Government, including Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre, Sai
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.

- On March 4 and 5, for Hong Kong residents in Hubei Province, the Government arranged four free chartered flights to bring a total of 469 people 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 four chartered flights to take a total of 558 Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province back to Hong Kong on March 25 and 26. After their arrival at Hong Kong, they were required to undergo compulsory home quarantine for 14 days.

- Peru has declared a state of emergency and imposed strict restrictions on all land and air traffic. The Government arranged a chartered flight 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 flights and arrived in Hong Kong on April 5. They were required to undergo 14 days of compulsory quarantine.

**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.

- On March 20, the government approved the first two production lines under the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme. On March 27, six more production lines under the scheme were approved. On April 17, another five production lines under the scheme were approved. The remaining seven production lines in the quota of 20 under the scheme were allocated on April 24.

- The Chief Executive announced on March 21 that two million surgical masks are to be provided monthly to residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities for use by the nursing staff.

**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.

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