

# 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 has 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.

## Reducing the flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland

- From **February 8**, **all persons arriving from the Mainland** or **who have visited the Mainland in the past 14 days** will be subject to compulsory **quarantine** for 14 days (certain categories of people are exempted this requirement such as those supplying goods or services required for the normal operation of Hong Kong or the daily needs of the people in Hong Kong, etc.).
- From **February 4**, the Government **closed all but two land boundary control points** (Shenzhen Bay and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge) with the Mainland to stem the flow of cross-boundary travel.
- Entry points at **Shenzhen Bay, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge** as well as **Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA)** remain open with customs and health monitoring resources concentrated at these entry points.
- **Health declarations for all incoming visitors** are required at land-based control points and HKIA.
- 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 **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**.
- On **January 24**, **flights and high speed rail services between Hong Kong and Wuhan suspended**.
- 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 are **suspended**.
- On **February 5**, immigration services at **Kai Tak Cruise Terminal** and **Ocean Terminal** are **suspended**.
- **All ferry services** to and from the **Mainland** and **Macao** are **suspended**.

- Mainland authorities have **suspended** the **Individual Visit Scheme for Mainland residents** visiting Hong Kong.

### **Preventing imported cases**

- From **March 25** (tentatively for 14 days), **all non-Hong Kong residents** arriving from overseas countries and regions **by plane** will be **denied entry** to Hong Kong;
- **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;
- All **transit services** at HKIA will be **suspended**;
- **All travellers** coming **from Macao and Taiwan, including Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong residents, will be subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine**, which is the same as the arrangements for people entering Hong Kong from the Mainland.

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 March 29 the number was 3,584).

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

- People who have had **close contact with confirmed COVID-19 cases** but are asymptomatic will be **placed under quarantine** at dedicated quarantine centres.
- People returning to Hong Kong **after visiting Wuhan** in the past 14 days will be placed under **compulsory quarantine at a quarantine centre** for 14 days.
- From **February 8**, **all persons arriving from the Mainland** or **who have visited the Mainland in the past 14 days** will be subject to **compulsory quarantine** for 14 days (certain categories of people are exempted this requirement such as those supplying goods or services required for the normal operation of Hong Kong or the daily needs of the people in Hong Kong, etc.).
- Hong Kong has imposed **quarantine arrangements on inbound travellers from overseas**:
  - 1. Quarantine at quarantine centre** – Hong Kong residents arriving in Hong Kong who have been to the following countries/areas in the past 14 days will have to stay in a quarantine centre for quarantine:
    - Daegu and Gyeongsangbuk-do in Korea
    - Iran
    - Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto regions in Italy
  - 2. Compulsory quarantine** – Hong Kong residents arriving in Hong Kong who have been to any countries/areas in the past 14 days will be subject to compulsory quarantine.
- 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 4 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.
- 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" ([www.erc.police.gov.hk/cmiser/CCC/PolicePublicPage?language=en](http://www.erc.police.gov.hk/cmiser/CCC/PolicePublicPage?language=en)) to report suspected cases of breaching quarantine orders.
- The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) strongly urges members of the public to **avoid all non-essential travel** outside Hong Kong.
- Currently, there are **three operating quarantine centres**, namely the **Chai Wan Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village**, the **Heritage Lodge at the Jao Tsung-I Academy**, and **Chun Yeung Estate in Fo Tan**, providing over 1,600 units. Three temporary accommodation facilities offered by the Government, including **Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre**, **Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre** and **Lady MacLehose Holiday Village** have also been made available for persons under compulsory quarantine who are unable to arrange accommodation.
- **All suspected cases** will be admitted to **isolation beds** in hospitals.
- **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 Hospital Authority 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 **March 20**, **people arriving in Hong Kong with upper respiratory symptoms** will be sent to the test centres at the AsiaWorld-Expo or the North Lantau Hospital for the viral test and to wait for the laboratory results.

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

- **Classes** at all Hong Kong schools are **suspended until further notice**.
- **Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education examination** will be deferred to **April 24**, and the speaking examinations of both Chinese and English language subjects will be cancelled.
- From **March 23**, a **"work from home"** arrangement has been implemented again **for Government employees**, except for those providing emergency, essential and limited basic public services.
- The Government **urges employers to make flexible work arrangements** for employees according to their operational needs.
- The Government will continue to **cancel or postpone events** that attract large crowds.
- The Government proposed to introduce legislation to **temporarily prohibit the sale and supply of alcoholic drinks** by about 8,600 restaurants, bars and clubs with liquor licences in Hong Kong.
- The Government requested the clubs on private recreational leases to **immediately close** all of their **recreational and sports facilities, changing rooms and play rooms for young children** in the clubs. Other private clubs and gymnasia are appealed to adopt the same measure.
- In accordance with the **Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation** (Cap. 599F) under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), catering premises were required to implement six measures starting at 6pm on March 28. The measures include ensuring the number of **customers must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity** of the premises; **a distance of at least 1.5 metres between one table and another table** is maintained or other partition arrangements are made; **no more than four persons are seated together** at a table; **a person must wear a mask** except when he/she is consuming food or drink on the premises; **body temperature screening** on persons entering the premises is conducted and **hand sanitisers are provided** for them. In addition, the second part of the regulation requires the **closure of six categories of premises** including **amusement game centres, bathhouses, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment** such as cinemas, and **"party rooms"** for hire for holding social gatherings. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.
- The Government published the **Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation** (the Regulation) (Cap.599G) in the Gazette on March 28 to **prohibit group**

**gatherings with more than four people in public places** (except for exempted group gatherings or those permitted by the Chief Secretary for Administration). The Regulation, commenced on March 29, will take effect for three months. Offenders are liable to a maximum penalty \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months.

### **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.
- Private and charitable organisations are urged to donate surgical masks to the underprivileged.
- The Government will help **residential care homes for the elderly** and **residential care homes for persons with disabilities** to strengthen disease prevention. The Chief Executive announced on March 23 that **two million surgical masks** are to be provided **monthly** to these institutions 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.