

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 constantly adjust the "Supress and Lift" strategy according to the actual 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 **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**, Hong Kong International Airport (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-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).
- 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 (DH) 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 June 3 the number was 2,419).

The Government will introduce 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 will be subject to compulsory quarantine arrangements, while those from Category 2 will be 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 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 **three operating quarantine centres**, namely **Chun Yeung Estate in Fo Tan, JPC Permanent Activity Centre and Integrated Youth Training Camp in Pat Heung, Yuen Long**, and **Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in Chai Wan**, providing over 2,000 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.

Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme

- **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 **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 8**, the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme was further extended to inbound travellers who have been to **Hubei Province in the past 14 days arriving via land boundary control points** (Shenzhen Bay Port and the HZMB).
- 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.
- The Government announced on **May 19** the stepping up of community surveillance of COVID-19, with testing conducted for selected staff members at residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes. Sample bottles are also distributed to the public in designated Chinese medicine clinics across Hong Kong and at the Kwai Tsing District Health Centre on a pilot basis.

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

- **Classes** at all Hong Kong schools had been suspended since the Chinese New Year holidays in late January. The Government announced on May 5 that classes will **resume by phases in a gradual and orderly manner from May 20**. Schools will adjust teaching arrangements and strengthen precautionary measures to provide a healthy and safe environment for students.
- 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. As the epidemic situation continued to stabilise, the Government has resumed public services under a phased approach from **May 4**.
- The Government will continue to **cancel or postpone events** that attract large crowds.
- Until **June 18**, catering premises are required to implement measures to promote social distancing: **at least 1.5 metres between tables** is maintained or other partition arrangements are made; **no more than eight people per table**; **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**.
- **Amusement game centres, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment** such as cinemas, **premises commonly known as bars or pubs, mahjong-tin kau premises, beauty parlours** and **massage establishments** have been allowed to **resume operation from May 8**. **From May 29, bathhouses, "party rooms" for hire for holding social gatherings, karaoke establishments, and clubs or nightclubs** will be allowed to **resume operation**. Their operations are subject to conditions to promote social distancing. The measure will be in effect until **June 18**. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.
- Group gatherings of **more than eight people in public places are prohibited** apart from gatherings exempted under relevant regulation. The prohibition will remain in force until **June 18**. Offenders are liable to a maximum penalty \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months.

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. Another chartered flight departed from New Delhi on **May 17** and a special flight departed from Mumbai on **June 4** bringing back about 250 and about 300 Hong Kong residents stranded in India respectively. **The costs were borne by the users**. They were transferred to Chun Yeung Estate for a 14-day compulsory quarantine after arriving in Hong Kong.
- **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. When in full production, the production lines will collectively supply 34.25 million masks to the Government and a further 7.65 million to the local market every month.
- 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.
- The Government announced on **May 5** that **locally developed reusable masks** are distributed **free to all Hong Kong citizens**, except babies and infants. Online registration to obtain the reusable masks began on May 6. In addition, a pack of 10 free surgical masks is expected to be distributed to every household in Hong Kong from end-June.

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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