

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

- 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-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.
- 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

- From **March 8**, the health declaration arrangements at HKIA were expanded to all flights arriving Hong Kong.
- 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 **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 April 5 the number was 1,649).

Enhanced quarantine arrangements for people at risk of carrying the infection

- People who are **close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases**, and people who enter Hong Kong **from Wuhan or who have been to Wuhan** in the past 14 days before arriving at Hong Kong, but are asymptomatic, will be **placed under compulsory quarantine** at dedicated quarantine centres.
- From **February 8**, **all people entering Hong Kong from the Mainland**, including Hong Kong residents, Mainland residents and visitors from other places 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 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 Hong Kong on **April 5**. They were required to undergo 14 days of compulsory quarantine.
- 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.
- The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) strongly urges members of the public to **avoid all non-essential travel** outside Hong Kong.
- 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 over 1,700 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.

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 20**, **people arriving in Hong Kong with upper respiratory symptoms** had been 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. **From April 5, the test services were consolidated at AsiaWorld-Expo.** The test centre also handles suspected cases referred by CHP, such as travellers under home quarantine or close contacts of confirmed cases.
- 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.

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

- **Classes** at all Hong Kong schools are **suspended until further notice**.
- On March 21, the Government announced that the **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 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 from 6pm on March 28 till 5:59 pm on April 11. 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.
- On April 1, the Government published the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) (Amendment) Regulation 2020 in the Gazette and issued directions effective from 6pm on the same day till 5.59pm on April 15 to require the **closure of karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau establishments** and **establishments commonly known as clubs or nightclubs**, and the suspension of karaoke and mahjong-tin kau activities in catering premises and club-houses. The directions also require **beauty parlour, club-house and massage establishment premises to conduct body temperature screening** on all persons before they are allowed to enter those premises and **to provide hand sanitizers**. A person within the beauty parlour, club-house and massage establishment premises **must wear a mask at any time where practicable**. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.
- Any premises commonly known as **bar or pub** must be **closed from 6pm on April 3** till 5.59pm on April 17. Any part of cater business premises or any area in a club-house that is exclusively or mainly used for the sale or supply of intoxicating liquors for consumption in that part or area must also be closed during the same period. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 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.

APRIL 2020