

Announcement by Judiciary

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

Preparation for Court Resumption

The Judiciary announced today (February 27) that it will, starting from March 2, adopt a progressive and staggered approach to pave the way for the orderly resumption of proceedings and re-opening of court registries/offices for all levels of courts/tribunals in March, if the prevailing public health situation permits.

In view of public health considerations, which are considerable and not to be underestimated, the Judiciary has generally adjourned court proceedings and closed court registries/offices since January 29, 2020, but urgent and essential court hearings and business were and will continue to be dealt with. During the General Adjourned Period (GAP), the Judiciary has been expanding the scope of urgent and essential court businesses, after striking a careful balance between public health considerations and the due administration of justice. The Judiciary wishes to stress that at all times, it is the public interest that is paramount.

Having regard to all relevant considerations, the Judiciary has been pro-actively making preparation for the resumption of court proceedings and re-opening of court registries/offices, subject to prevailing public health situation. In working out the detailed arrangements of resumption, the Judiciary has given due consideration for the following:

- (a) an orderly resumption of both registry businesses and court proceedings is of the paramount importance;
- (b) a staggered and progressive approach is to be adopted to ensure orderly resumption; and
- (c) parties concerned, be they legally represented or litigants in person, will be given clear notifications and sufficient lead time for preparation of their cases, regardless of whether the hearings are to be re-fixed or proceed as scheduled.

The progressive and staggered resumption approach comprises the following few key stages :

- (a) week of March 2 – while proceedings are continued to be generally adjourned and the registries remain closed, as enhanced measures, filing of certain types of documents which are urgent would be accepted under some special arrangements. Moreover, more urgent and essential hearings, including appeals and trials, will be heard at various levels of courts as appropriate;

(b) weeks of March 9 and March 16 – while court proceedings will continue to be generally adjourned except for urgent and essential hearings, court registries will be re-opened by batches; and

(c) week of March 23 – expected end of GAP if public health situation permits. In general, an appropriate buffer period would be provided before hearings, particularly trials, are to be resumed.

The Judiciary has been working out the resumption arrangements and will make further announcements. The Judiciary will continue to closely liaise with all relevant stakeholders including the Department of Justice, the Bar Association and the Law Society in working out the details. More detailed resumption arrangements will be announced in the near future.

Arrangements for March 2 to March 8 : Further Enhanced Measures

Having regard to the prevailing public health situation, all hearings of the courts/tribunals originally scheduled from March 2 to March 8 will generally be adjourned. The courts will however continue to handle urgent and essential hearings and/or matters during this period, such as fresh remand cases, urgent and essential criminal matters (including bail-related and sentencing hearings), handing down of decisions and judgments that are ready, urgent and essential oral hearings (including appeals and magistracy appeals) and other urgent applications to the courts.

As indicated before, the Judiciary has been constantly reviewing the scope of urgent and essential businesses, and making adjustments on a regular basis, bearing in mind that the longer the general adjournment has become, the more matters may become urgent and essential. As a result of the latest review, an expanded list of urgent and essential matters will be effective from March 2. In particular, more urgent and essential court hearings, including appeals, hearings and trials, will be handled. Moreover, special arrangements will be made to accept the filing of more documents while the registries remain closed.

Enhanced preventive measures in Judiciary premises

Having regard to latest public health considerations, and with more people coming to the court premises, in addition to the preventive measures which have been implemented earlier, starting from March 2, all court users entering or remaining in Judiciary premises will be required to wear surgical masks at all times, including during court proceedings, unless otherwise as directed by the presiding judges and judicial officers. A court user who does not wear a surgical mask will be refused entry into or directed to leave Judiciary premises.

The Judiciary will continue to review the situation and introduce any new or enhanced preventive measures as necessary.

Enquiries and information update

For enquiries regarding general arrangements on the court businesses, the following hotlines are being operated from Monday to Friday 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm:

- General Information: 2869 0869
- Court of Final Appeal: 2123 0123
- High Court: 2523 2212
- Probate: 2840 1683
- District Court: 2845 5696
- Family Court: 2840 1218
- Lands Tribunal: 2771 3034
- Labour Tribunal: 2625 0020
- Small Claims Tribunal: 2877 4068
- Magistrates' Courts: 2677 8373

The Judiciary will continue to post updated information, including Daily Cause Lists, messages related to the Judiciary's arrangements arising from public health considerations, and advice to court users visiting the courts during the GAP, on the Judiciary website (www.judiciary.hk). Court users are advised to check the website for updated information as necessary.