

Announcement by Judiciary

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary today (March 28) announced that in view of the latest public health considerations, the General Adjourned Period (will continue from March 30 (Monday) to April 13 (Monday), and be subject to review having regard to the prevailing public health situation. It is important to underline the fact that the public's health and safety, including that of court users and court staff, remain paramount considerations in the handling of court operations by the Judiciary.

While during GAP, courts will continue to handle certain urgent and essential business, the Judiciary will put in place public health measures to ensure appropriate social distancing for court users attending to court business.

Social Distancing

The Judiciary has to strike a careful balance between the due administration of justice (particularly given the uncertainty of the duration of GAP) and the latest public health situation. Individual court cases or businesses on their own may not add very much to public health risks. However, if many cases or business are conducted at the same time at same court premises, their combined impact on public health risks as a whole may increase. As such, the Judiciary has been adopting a "space-out" approach to ensure that people flow in court premises is smooth and that court premises, including office areas, are not overcrowded. This is reflected in the limited scope of business, including registry business (as revised from time to time), the manner in which cases are listed for hearing, the number of courts that are opened for hearing, the number of and manner in which magistrates' courts (MCs) are opened for business, and the preventive and crowd control measures implemented.

In particular, the Judiciary will continue to use various means to space out court proceedings, with suitable adjustments as appropriate to suit the latest situation. Where appropriate, the number of cases to be handled in the same courtroom at any one session will be reduced. This will in turn reduce the number of people who will need to be in a courtroom at any point in time. Additional holding space or waiting area(s) in other courtroom(s) or at court lobbies will be provided whenever possible so that fewer people will need to gather in a courtroom. Broadcasting of proceedings will be done on a needs basis. For certain levels of court such as the MCs, more court buildings will operate on any given day so that the cases may be spread out for handling in more courtrooms.

There will also be capacity limits for each courtroom, court lobby, and registry areas to contain the people flow within reasonable limits and having

regard to the need for social distancing. To help enforce such controls, queuing system will be implemented as appropriate. The Judiciary also urges court users, including legal practitioners, to minimise the number of people coming to the court.

Court Proceedings

All court/tribunal hearings will generally be adjourned during this period unless they are urgent and essential business as directed by the presiding Judge or Judicial Officer. Parties will be notified only if their hearings will be held as scheduled during this period.

Other urgent and essential hearings will continue to be handled in accordance with the established mechanisms, including the Duty Judge system. The updated list of urgent and essential hearings and matters is uploaded onto the Judiciary website. Court users and the public are strongly urged to check the website regularly as the list may be subject to change at short notice due to rapidly changing public health situation.

Starting from March 30, three MCs will operate each day from Monday to Friday (except public holidays) and the holiday sittings will be adopted for public holidays. The detailed arrangements are as follows:

March 30 (Monday)	Kwun Tong MCs, West Kowloon MCs and Fanling MCs will open
March 31 (Tuesday)	Eastern MCs, Kowloon City MCs and Tuen Mun MCs will open
April 1 (Wednesday)	Eastern MCs, West Kowloon MCs and Shatin MCs will open
April 2 (Thursday)	Kwun Tong MCs, Kowloon City MCs and Fanling MCs will open
April 3 (Friday)	Eastern MCs, West Kowloon MCs and Tuen Mun MCs will open
April 4 (Saturday)	Holiday sitting will be adopted and Shatin MCs will open
April 5 (Sunday)	No MCs will open
April 6 (Monday)	Eastern MCs, Kowloon City MCs and Shatin MCs will open
April 7 (Tuesday)	Kwun Tong MCs, West Kowloon MCs and Fanling MCs will open
April 8 (Wednesday)	Eastern MCs, Kowloon City MCs and Tuen Mun MCs will open
April 9 (Thursday)	Eastern MCs, West Kowloon MCs and Shatin MCs will open
April 10 (Friday)	No Magistrates' Courts will open
April 11 (Saturday)	Holiday sitting will be adopted and Eastern MCs will open

April 12 (Sunday)	No Magistrates' Courts will open
April 13 (Monday)	Holiday sitting will be adopted and Eastern MCs will open

Registries and Offices

Court/tribunal registries and offices will generally be closed during this period, but enhanced measures will be introduced so that more business will be handled. The list of business that will be handled by the registries during this period is uploaded onto the Judiciary website. Again, court users and the public are strongly urged to check the website regularly as the list may be subject to change at short notice due to rapidly changing public health situation.

Preventive and crowd management measures

The Judiciary will continue to put in place appropriate preventive and crowd management measures for the health protection of all people who are required to enter and remain in the court premises for urgent and essential business. Court users are required to have their body temperature taken and wear a surgical mask before they are allowed to enter and remain in the court premises.

To support the above arrangements, necessary queuing and other crowd management measures, as well as security controls to limit the number of court users entering and remaining in the Judiciary premises, will be put in place as appropriate. To maintain social distancing, the seating capacity of courtrooms and lobbies are reduced by about 50 per cent. In addition, capacity limits are set for confined areas such as registries and offices to avoid crowding of users.

Parties, legal representatives and other court users are reminded that they should not come to the Judiciary premises to attend court proceedings or conduct businesses at court registry/office if they are subject to quarantine requirement or medical surveillance of the Government. Court users who are subject to any quarantine requirement or medical surveillance of the Government should as soon as practicable apply to the court for permission of absence or inform the court with reasons for absence as appropriate.

Information on the detailed arrangements will be provided and uploaded onto the Judiciary website. Court users are strongly advised to check the updated information on the Judiciary website, and follow the advice of the Judiciary staff and security personnel when they attend court premises for court business.

For enquiries regarding general arrangements on the court businesses during the period, 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, on the Judiciary website (www.judiciary.hk). Court users are advised to check the website for updated information as necessary.