

Announcement by Judiciary

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary announced today (April 22) that the General Adjourned Period (GAP), which started on January 29, will end on May 3. From May 4, all court proceedings will generally resume as safely as circumstances permit. In the same way, court and tribunal registries will also start to re-open by stages from May 6, the first stage including the registries of the Court of Final Appeal and the High Court. Having regard to the public health situation and the need for social distancing, court business will initially be conducted under reduced capacity. This will be closely monitored and adjustments made where appropriate.

The Judiciary stresses that public health and safety, including that of court users, the Judiciary's staff and Judges and Judicial Officers (JJOs), continue to be paramount considerations in the handling of court operations by the Judiciary. The Judiciary will however conduct as much court business as practicable, having regard to the prevailing public health situation. The extent of court operations will be contingent on a number of factors, including the need to adopt measures to facilitate social distancing, e.g. setting limits on the number of hearings to be held on each court floor on all Judiciary premises, etc.

Resumption of court proceedings

From May 4, all hearings, both civil and criminal proceedings, including trials, will generally resume unless they are adjourned pursuant to specific directions by the court, but with reduced capacity. However, jury trials will only start after May. To ensure an orderly resumption of court proceedings, an appropriate buffer period will be provided before hearings, particularly trials, are resumed. Parties concerned, be they legally represented or litigants in person, will be given clear notification and directions on the mode of hearings with sufficient lead time for preparation. More details will be provided to court users in the stakeholders' notifications to be issued in due course.

For civil proceedings, the court will continue to adopt a flexible and multi-pronged approach. JJOs will continue to proactively manage their cases and directions will be given to the parties as necessary. Where appropriate, JJOs will consider disposing the cases on paper as far as possible. JJOs may also invite parties to explore the use of Video Conferencing Facilities (VCF) or conduct hearings by telephone where appropriate.

Re-opening of court registries and accounts offices

To coincide with the end of the GAP, the Judiciary will re-open court and tribunal registries and accounts offices by stages and in a staggered

manner:

- (a) May 6 (Wednesday) – Court of Final Appeal/High Court
- (b) May 8 (Friday) – District Court
- (c) May 13 (Wednesday) – Family Court
- (d) May 15 (Friday) – Lands Tribunal
- (e) May 19 (Tuesday) – Magistrates' Courts/Coroner's Court/Obscene Articles Tribunal
- (f) May 21 (Thursday) – Small Claims Tribunal/Labour Tribunal.

The opening hours of the court registries and accounts offices will be reduced to from 9.30am to 12.30pm until further notice. Some registry business, such as search and inspection of case files, cause books and orders, will be conducted in the afternoon. More details will be announced closer to the time of the re-opening, and court users are advised to refer to the Judiciary website for details.

Re-opening of other offices of the Judiciary

A staggered approach will also be adopted for the re-opening of other offices that provide services to court users and the public:

- (a) May 4 (Monday) – Court Language Section's Certification Counter in Wanchai Law Courts Building (WLCB); Bailiff Offices' Public Counters at various court premises; Integrated Mediation Office in WLCB; High Court Library
- (b) May 11 (Monday) – Resource Centre for Unrepresented Litigants at High Court Building
- (c) May 15 (Friday) – Building Management Mediation Co-ordinator's Office in Lands Tribunal
- (d) May 25 (Monday) – Small Claims Tribunal Information Centre; Counter Services at Complaints Office at High Court Building

The opening hours of the offices are as follows: 2.30pm to 4.30pm for the High Court Library and 9.30am to 12.30pm for the remaining offices until further notice. Court users are advised to refer to the Judiciary website for the details.

The Canteen in the High Court Building and the Tuck Shop in the West Kowloon Law Courts Building will remain closed until further notice.

For offices on Judiciary premises operated by other government departments or outside organisations, court users should enquire with the relevant service providers direct for details relating to the re-opening of these offices.

Preventive and crowd management measures

The Judiciary will continue to put in place appropriate preventive and crowd management measures. These measures include requiring all people entering Judiciary premises to undergo body temperature check, to wear face

masks, and putting in place necessary queuing, ticketing and triage systems, designated entry and exit points, as well as admission control to limit the number of court users entering and remaining on Judiciary premises.

To maintain social distancing, chessboard seating arrangement will continue to be adopted in courtrooms and court lobbies with seating capacity reduced to half. Broadcasting of proceedings will be arranged on a need basis. Capacity limits will also be set for areas such as court registries and accounts offices to avoid crowding.

Parties, legal representatives and other court users who are subject to any quarantine requirements or medical surveillance should not come to the Judiciary premises. They 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 detailed arrangements will be 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 for court business. The cooperation of court users is necessary and is appreciated.

For enquiries regarding general arrangements for court business, the following hotlines are being operated from Monday to Friday 9.30am 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
- Bailiff Section: 2802 7510
- Court Language Section: 2388 1364

The Judiciary will continue to post updated information, including Daily Cause Lists, all arrangements in relation to Judiciary business and advice to court users, on the Judiciary website (www.judiciary.hk). Court users are advised to check the website for updated information as necessary.