

Courts to generally adjourn all proceedings between March 7 and April 11

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary announced today (March 4), that in light of the latest public health situation and related developments, all hearings of the courts and tribunals originally scheduled between March 7 and April 11, 2022, will generally be adjourned with the exception of the business as set out in the Notification for Stakeholders attached.

General adjournment of proceedings (GAP)

Court service is an essential public service. It enables the effective and efficient administration of justice, which is integral to the Judiciary's constitutional duty to uphold the rule of law. There is a strong public interest for the Judiciary to ensure that justice is not unduly delayed. This is particularly so in view of the huge upsurge of cases awaiting adjudication involving multiple defendants in custody and requiring longer processing times at all levels of court. There are also many cases which cannot afford to wait, such as bail applications and review, other criminal cases involving defendants in custody, and care and protection orders for juveniles.

The Judiciary has been closely monitoring the public health situation since the outbreak of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in January. Social distancing measures have been enhanced and court operations adjusted with a view to ensuring that the courts can continue to carry on business as safely as circumstances permit.

This short GAP period of around one month has been drawn up by the Judiciary after striking a balance between public health considerations and due administration of justice, following the latest impact assessment of the ongoing pandemic on the parties, court users, stakeholders and manpower support of the Judiciary.

This GAP will substantially reduce the capacity and business of the courts, hence significantly enhancing social distancing and crowd control in all court premises.

In response to any further deterioration in the public health situation and the Government's further anti-pandemic measures (including compulsory universal testing), the Judiciary may need to further reduce the scope of court operations and business at very short notice where necessary. However, given the undesirable consequences of a prolonged GAP period on the due administration of justice, the Judiciary will endeavour to resume fuller or normal operations as quickly as possible once circumstances permit.

The Judiciary is grateful to all court users and stakeholders, as well as its support staff, for their understanding and co-operation during this challenging period.

Other services

The Judiciary has been developing in phases an integrated court case management system across all levels of court for handling court-related documents and payments through an electronic mode. Consequent to the GAP arrangements, the plan to roll out the electronic mode in the District Court in phases from this month will be put on hold for the time being.

Public health measures

For public health reasons, the Judiciary will continue to maintain all existing preventive and crowd management measures, including enhanced cleaning and disinfection of public and staff areas, mandatory body temperature checks and checks on use of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app together with the presentation of a vaccine pass upon entry into Judiciary premises, mandatory wearing of surgical masks at all times unless otherwise directed by Judges or Judicial Officers, providing hand sanitisers at different locations, and installing protective shields and partitions in courtrooms as appropriate.

Any court users including parties and legal representatives who have a fever or a high body temperature, and/or are subject to any quarantine requirement or medical surveillance or compulsory testing while waiting for test results, or who have preliminarily tested positive or tested positive for COVID-19, are not allowed to enter Judiciary premises. They should apply to the court as soon as practicable for permission of absence or inform the court with reasons for absence as appropriate.

The Judiciary will continue to closely monitor the public health situation with a view to putting in place timely and appropriate measures. Court users should check the Judiciary website (www.judiciary.hk) for updated information, and follow the instructions of the Judiciary staff and security personnel.

Enquiries

For enquiries regarding general arrangements on the court business, the following hotlines are being operated from Monday to Friday, from 8.45am to 1pm and from 2pm to 5.30pm:

- General Information: 2869 0869
- Court of Final Appeal: 2123 0123
- High Court: 2523 2212

- Probate: 2840 1683
- Competition Tribunal: 2825 0426
- 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
- Obscene Articles Tribunal: 3916 6303
- Coroner's Court: 3916 6204
- Bailiff Section: 2802 7510
- Court Language Section: 2388 1364