

HKSAR Government announces enhanced measures for disease prevention and control

Following the escalation of the response level to Emergency under the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance on January 25, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, has convened the Steering Committee cum Command Centre for three consecutive days since January 26 to tackle the situation in relation to novel coronavirus infection. Taking into account the development speed and severity of the situation, the Steering Committee cum Command Centre decided at its meeting yesterday (January 28) to further implement seven disease prevention and control measures. The measures include reducing the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong as well as contacts among members of the public, with a view to lowering the chance of the disease being imported into Hong Kong and spreading in the community.

(1) Significantly reducing the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong

In order to reduce the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the Mainland authorities have agreed to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's request to suspend the issuance of endorsements in all 49 cities under the Individual Visit Scheme, including the "one trip per week" endorsement, on top of the earlier suspension of all tour groups to Hong Kong. According to the figures for December last year, visitors under the Individual Visit Scheme accounted for about 50 per cent of all Mainland visitors. This measure will significantly reduce the number of Mainland visitors to Hong Kong.

In addition, the following transport services and border control point services will be reduced or suspended:

- (a) On railway services, the services of the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Intercity Through Train will be suspended;
- (b) On aviation services, Mainland flights will be cut to about half;
- (c) On ferry services, all cross-boundary ferry services to and from the China Ferry Terminal and the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal will be suspended;
- (d) On land-based cross-boundary transport, cross-boundary coach and shuttle bus services (including the short-haul cross-boundary coach service at Huanggang Port, Yellow Bus and Gold Bus) using the Lok Ma Chau Control Point, the Shenzhen Bay Port and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port will reduce the service frequency;
- (e) The services of the West Kowloon Station, Hung Hom Station, China Ferry Terminal and Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal control points will be suspended. The passenger services in Sha Tau Kok and Man Kam To will also be suspended, but

the services for goods will not be affected.

The above measures will be effective from the early hours of January 30 until further notice.

The above measures will not only reduce the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong, but also allow relevant departments to focus resources on control points which remain in service through redeployment, thereby strengthening the health checks of travellers. In addition, body temperature checks and health declarations for departing travellers have already been implemented in all Mainland ports, including those in Shenzhen. The HKSAR Government will strengthen its joint efforts with the Mainland authorities in disease prevention and control, including putting in place more infrared body temperature checking equipment in border control points in Hong Kong to implement body temperature checks for departing travellers.

(2) Fee charging by the Hospital Authority

The current Hospital Authority fee-charging policy serves a public health strategy, which is to waive the charges for Ineligible Persons (i.e. non-Hong Kong residents) to avoid a situation in which patients suffering from infectious disease evade tests due to their cost and spread the disease in the community. However, as Hong Kong has entered a key stage in its efforts in preventing the disease, in order to not make the fee waiver an incentive for persons infected by novel coronavirus to come to Hong Kong for medical care, the HKSAR Government has requested the Hospital Authority to adjust its fee-charging policy. The Hospital Authority will charge all Ineligible Persons the relevant fees with immediate effect.

(3) Reducing the flow and contacts of people in Hong Kong

The HKSAR Government urges Hong Kong people to return from the Mainland as soon as possible. All persons returning from the Mainland are advised to stay home for 14 days upon their return as far as possible. Those who need to go out should wear a surgical mask for 14 days. Hong Kong residents should refrain from travelling to places with the disease.

The HKSAR Government appeals to employers to make flexible work arrangements for employees in accordance with their operational needs. Except for staff providing emergency and essential public services, all other employees of the Government are not required to return to their offices but to work at home after the holidays. The measure will be implemented tentatively until February 2. The Government will review the situation before then.

(4) Assisting Hong Kong residents in Hubei

As of January 27, the HKSAR Government had received 107 requests for assistance in relation to the novel coronavirus, involving about 200 Hong Kong people in Hubei Province. As public transport services in the relevant places have been suspended completely, the HKSAR Government is now discussing

with the Central Authorities on ways to arrange for Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei to return to Hong Kong in a safe and practical manner.

(5) Hubei residents in Hong Kong

Hubei residents have been restricted from entering Hong Kong since January 27. For those Hubei residents who have already entered Hong Kong, they are only allowed to stay in Hong Kong for seven days in general, so it is believed that the number of these people in Hong Kong will gradually decrease. The HKSAR Government is reaching out to hotels through the hotel industry and the Hong Kong Tourism Board to contact travellers from Hubei Province and is also contacting students from Hubei returning to Hong Kong through the tertiary institutions. The Centre for Health Protection will then follow up. The HKSAR Government also appeals to all Hong Kong residents who have been to Hubei Province in the past 14 days to call the Centre's hotline 2125 1122 as soon as possible.

(6) Quarantine centre facilities

To tackle the disease, the HKSAR Government will continue to identify suitable places to serve as quarantine centre facilities and other purposes. It, however, will not consider Fai Ming Estate or other unoccupied public housing estates. If there are not enough quarantine centre facilities and there is a wide spread of the disease in the community, the HKSAR Government may need to impose home isolation for the relevant persons.

(7) Surgical masks and other supplies

Apart from stocking up on adequate protective equipment (e.g. surgical masks) for government departments and the Hospital Authority in accordance with the HKSAR Government's response plan for infectious diseases, the HKSAR Government is concerned about public demand for surgical masks. As the supply is tight, the HKSAR Government is conducting worldwide procurement in order to ensure adequate supplies for tackling the disease. The HKSAR Government will also make available adequate resources for all the disease prevention and control efforts.

In addition to the above-mentioned measures, the HKSAR Government started to impose restrictions on Hubei residents and those who have visited Hubei Province in the past 14 days from entering Hong Kong since January 27. It also announced some adjustments of services subsidised by the Social Welfare Department and the closure of some leisure and cultural facilities. The HKSAR Government appeals to members of the public to pay attention to the announcements of the relevant departments and appreciates their understanding on the possible inconvenience caused.

Mrs Lam expresses her gratitude to all those involved in the prevention and control of the disease for their hard work, in particular the front-line colleagues in the Centre for Health Protection and the Port Health Division of the Department of Health as well as all hospitals and clinics of the Hospital Authority, and also the staff members providing support services in

environmental hygiene and those in the Government Laboratory. She once again appeals to the public to work together in disease prevention and control.