

(English Translation)



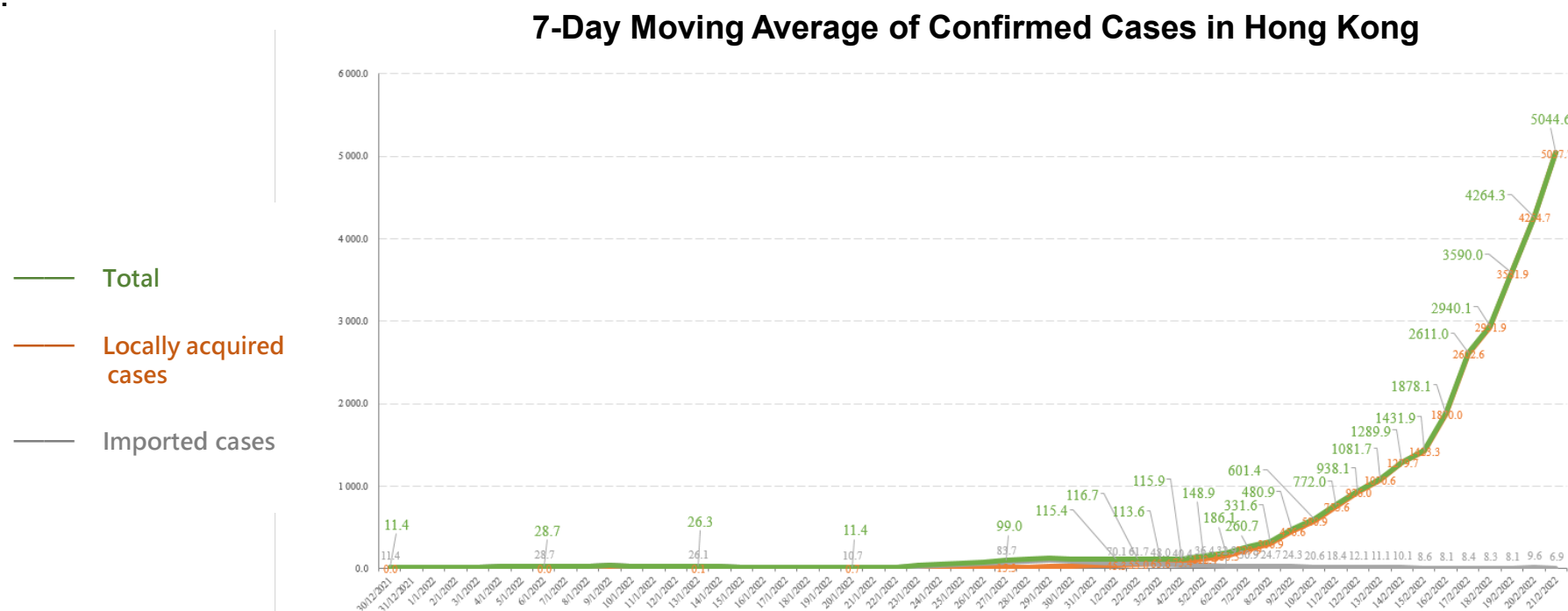
國家全力支援 特區齊心抗疫

Combating the Epidemic with Staunch National Support



At critical juncture in combating acute situation of epidemic

- The fifth wave of the epidemic was triggered by the highly transmissible Omicron variant, and fuelled by the Delta variant found on hamsters imported into Hong Kong, causing widespread transmission of the virus. Coupled with cross-family gatherings around the Lunar New Year, these have led to an exponential growth in confirmed cases since February.

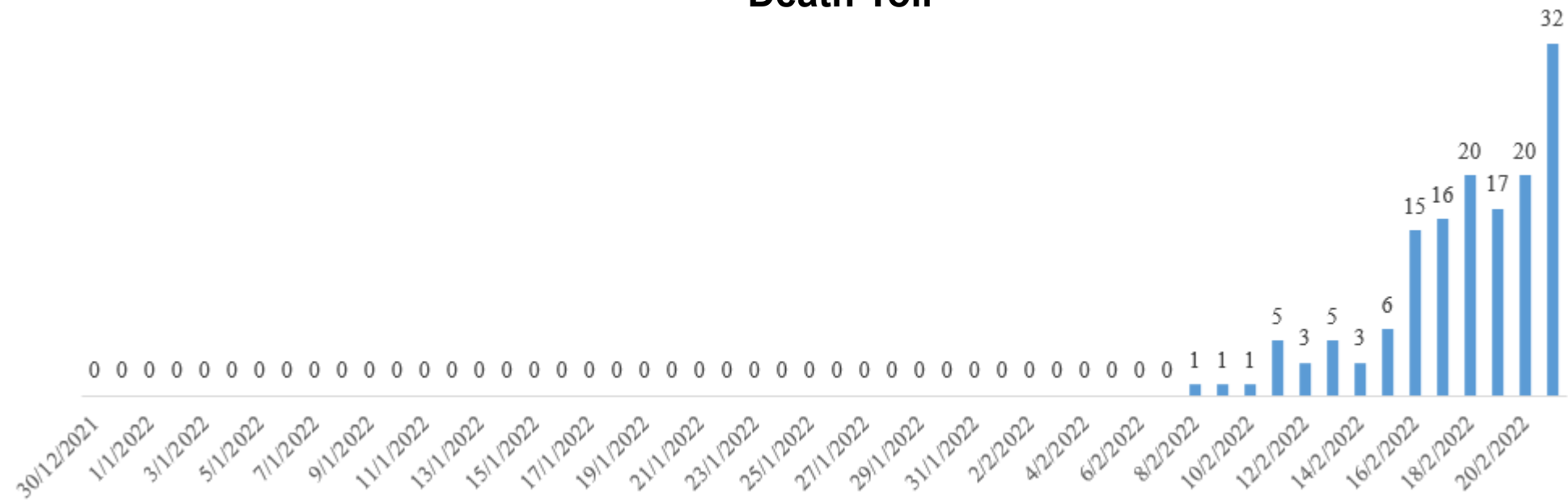


- The number of confirmed cases recorded since the outbreak of this current wave is 53 943, four times the total of the confirmed cases recorded in the past two years.

At critical juncture in combating acute situation of epidemic (cont'd)

- A total of 145 persons have passed away since the outbreak of the fifth wave of the epidemic. Most of them are senior citizens with chronic diseases. The deaths of three children is worrying, with the cause to be investigated in detail.

Death Toll



- The number of deaths recorded since the outbreak of this current wave is 145, accounting for over 60% of the total number of deaths recorded in the past two years.

At critical juncture in combating acute situation of epidemic (cont'd)

- Various surveillance indicators have shown that the disease is widespread in the community
 - Sewage surveillance: Most of the sewage samples collected from stationary points and mobile points have tested positive

Date (2022)	Location	Sewage viral level Low Med High	Proportion of positive cases (by number of tests)
2.20	Ying Yat House, Yat Tung (I) Estate, Tung Chung	+++	7.9%
2.19	Pok Tat House, Pok Hong Estate, Sha Tin	+++	3.2%
	King Wo House, Wo Che Estate, Sha Tin	+++	2.8%
2.18	Block 21, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po	+++	7.8%
2.17	Mei Wui House, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po	+++	2.6%
2.16	Yiu Ping House, Yiu On Estate, Sha Tin	+++	2.0%
2.16	Mun Wo House, Mun Tung Estate, Tung Chung	+++	1.3%
2.15	Ching Long House, Ching Ho Estate, Sheung Shui	+++	1.4%
2.14	Wah Yu House, Wah Fu (I) Estate, Aberdeen	+++	1.8%
2.13	Lee Shing House, Lee On Estate, Sha Tin	+++	1.3%
2.12	Mau Chuen House, Shui Chuen O Estate, Sha Tin	+++	0.7%
	Ching Cheung House, Cheung Lung Wai Estate, Sheung Shui	+++	0.4%
2.11	Begonia House, So Uk Estate, Sham Shui Po	+++	0.8%
	Un Shing House, Un Cha Estate, Sham Shui Po	+++	1.2%
2.10	Hung Lok House, Hung Fuk Estate, Yuen Long	++	0.6%
2.09	Fung Ping House & Cheuk Ping House, Long Ping Estate, Yuen Long	+++	0.7%
	Shing Yin House, Tin Shing Court, Tin Shui Wai	+++	0.6%
2.08	Wang Shing House & Wang Chi House, Wang Fuk Court, Tai Po	+++	0.4%
	Mei Fung House, Mei Lam Estate, Sha Tin	+++	0.6%
2.07	Fu Yuet House, Fu Cheong Estate, Sham Shui Po	++	0.6%
2.06	Mei Sau House & Mei King House, Mei Tin Estate, Sha Tin	++	0.3%
	Mei Chi House, Mei Tin Estate, Sha Tin	++	0.4%
	Leung Kit House, Leung King Estate, Tuen Mun	+++	1.6%
	Leung Wai House, Leung King Estate, Tuen Mun	+++	0.2%
2.05	Sun Yuet House & Sun Wai House, Sun Chui Estate, Sha Tin	++	0.3%
	Hing Cheung House, Tai Hing Estate, Tuen Mun	++	<0.1%
	Hing Tai House, Tai Hing Estate, Tuen Mun	++	0.3%
2.04	Tai Nan Street, Apliu Street, Shek Kip Mei Street, Yu Chau Street, Lai Chi Kok Road, Nam Cheong Street, Sham Shui Po	+	0.2%
2.03	Fu Cheong Court, Kwai Cheong Court and Wing Cheong Court, Fortune Plaza, On Chee Road, Tai Po	+	0.4%
2.01	Serenity Villa, Tai Po	+++	0.5%
1.30	Shek Wah House, Shek Lei (II) Estate, Kwai Chung	+	<0.1%
1.27	Block 1 and Block 2 of Hsin Kuanq Centre, Wong Tai Sin	+	<0.1%

- The proportion of the preliminary positive cases detected during “restriction-testing declaration” (RTD) operations is on a rise - from below 0.5% (or 5 out of 1 000 residents subject to testing) in the RTD operations conducted early this month to 2-8% (or 20-80 out of 1 000 residents subject to testing) in the operations conducted recently

Assuming primary responsibility and leverage Central Authorities' support to curb epidemic

- In pursuit of “dynamic zero infection”, Hong Kong has been strictly implementing the strategy of “preventing the importation of cases and the spread of the virus in the community” and endeavouring to contain the virus by a multi-pronged approach so as to achieve “early identification, early isolation and early treatment” of the infected, with a view to safeguarding the lives and health of Hong Kong people
- Having regard to the development of the fifth wave of the epidemic, the Government has been, with its own continuous efforts, adjusting and enhancing its anti-epidemic measures. However, the rapid deterioration of the epidemic has outgrown the Government's handling capacity, hence an urgent need for the Central Authorities' assistance
- The Central Authorities have all along been providing their strongest support for the HKSAR in ensuring the steadfast and successful implementation of “One Country, Two Systems” and maintaining the long-term prosperity and stability of the city

Assuming primary responsibility and leverage Central Authorities' support to curb epidemic (cont'd)

- Deeply concerned about Hong Kong's epidemic situation and caring about the well-being of Hong Kong people, the Central Authorities have rolled out strong and swift support initiatives
- According to the important instructions of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Xi Jinping, the HKSAR Government should assume the primary responsibility –
 - to stabilise the epidemic situation early as the overriding mission at present, mobilise all available manpower and resources, and adopt all necessary measures
 - to safeguard the lives and health of Hong Kong people and the stability of society
- Conveyed to the Chief Executive by Vice Premier of the State Council Han Zheng
- Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council Xia Baolong has been chairing meetings in Shenzhen to co-ordinate the assistance for Hong Kong to fight the epidemic

Assuming primary responsibility and leverage Central Authorities' support to curb epidemic (cont'd)

- Full-fledged support from the Central Authorities –
 - Increase nucleic acid testing capacity: Swabbers, mobile testing vehicles, testing technicians, etc., have arrived in Hong Kong in phases; support has been given to enhance the laboratory capability of the HKSAR Government's testing contractors, viz. the Huo-Yan Laboratory in Ma On Shan Sports Centre has commenced operation; the air-inflated laboratory in Wong Chuk Hang Sports Centre has been set up and for commencing operation shortly and another air-inflated laboratory will be set up in Kowloon Park Sports Centre
 - Provide anti-epidemic medical supplies: Rapid antigen test kits, KN95 face masks, Chinese medicines, protective gear and medical products from the Mainland are being delivered to Hong Kong in batches
 - Construct community isolation and treatment facilities [see subsequent pages]
 - Ensure fresh food supply from the Mainland: Make special arrangements for Hong Kong's cross-boundary goods vehicle drivers, deploy water transportation, and Guangdong and Hong Kong have agreed in-principle to open up Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point as additional temporary fresh food control point for emergency use to further stabilise the supply of fresh food to Hong Kong
 - Send experts to Hong Kong to offer assistance: Mainland epidemiological experts and experts in critical care medicine have arrived in Hong Kong in phases

Overall action plan to stabilise epidemic situation early

- The coming **two to three months** are most critical. We must keep on stepping up efforts in –
 - “early identification” and “early isolation” to cut virus transmission chains
 - adopting a triage measure in patient treatment to reduce severe cases and deaths
 - strictly preventing the importation of cases at boundary control points
 - further tightening social distancing measures to significantly reduce people flow and prevent virus spread
 - increasing the vaccination rate, especially among the elderly and children
- To this end, most of the measures shall be extended **until mid- or late April**

Adjusting class arrangements of schools in 2021/22 school year

- To make special arrangements to bring forward the holidays originally scheduled for July and August to March and April, allowing all sectors of society to focus efforts on fighting the epidemic and the Government to make full use of schools for testing, quarantine and vaccination operations. Students can return to schools safely and healthily when the epidemic subsides
 - Applicable to all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong (including international schools and special schools), but not post-secondary institutions
 - Expected to take effect in early March to allow some time for schools to make preparations and parents to make care arrangements for their children
 - Schools will resume teaching after the Easter holidays, striving to commence the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (DSE) on April 22 as scheduled. Subject to the development of the epidemic, local primary schools and international schools are planned to resume face-to-face classes first, while secondary school students will continue to learn from home and will not resume face-to-face classes until the completion of DSE core subjects
 - The last school day of the 2021/22 school year will be August 12, 2022 while the arrangement for the 2022/23 school year remains unchanged

Enhancing capacity for “early identification” by launching Compulsory Universal Testing

- To launch the Compulsory Universal Testing (CUT) with legal effect together with a punishment mechanism within March. All members of the public will have to take three nucleic acid tests
- With the support of the Central Authorities and concerted efforts of local testing contractors, the daily capacity of specimen collection and testing will be raised to not less than one million
- Hundreds of testing centres across the territory will be set up for the public to make bookings for testing in batches according to their years of birth (special arrangements will be considered to facilitate residents' undergoing testing together with two elderly people or children)
- Each resident having undergone tests will be given sufficient rapid antigen test kits for use between two tests, as well as KN95 masks or equivalent for daily use to enhance protection
- Before the implementation of CUT, the Government will focus on stepping up operations of RTDs supplemented by sewage surveillance, compulsory testing notices (CTNs), and regular testing of targeted groups
- After completion of CUT, the various testing operations will still be carried out to monitor the epidemic situation and prevent infection

Enhancing capacity for “early isolation” by ramping up community isolation and treatment facilities

- Those who test positive for COVID-19, whether they have symptoms or not, should be kept in isolation as soon as possible instead of staying at home so as not to infect others. However, due to the acute shortage of isolation facilities for the time being, it is estimated that 30 000 persons who have tested positive or preliminarily positive are still at home pending admission to community isolation facilities or hospitals. The Department of Health and Hospital Authority (HA) are rendering assistance to them (including arranging for them electronic wristbands, anti-epidemic kits, a hotline for enquiries on medical issues, designated clinic booking service and delivery by designated taxis) and it is still the Government’s policy objective to subjecting such people to isolation
- The Government is making all-out efforts to construct community isolation facilities to take in persons who test positive for COVID-19 but with mild or no symptoms
 - It is expected that the number of units can be increased from around 5 000 at present to 12 000 in February from the isolation facilities at Penny’s Bay, Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, three unoccupied public housing estates and Community Isolation Facility (CIF) hotels
 - It is expected that an additional 16 000-plus units mainly from CIF hotels and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal as converted will be available in March

Enhancing capacity for “early isolation” by ramping up community isolation and treatment facilities (cont’d)

- With the support of the Central Authorities –
 - The construction of community isolation facilities at Penny’s Bay Phase 2 and on the land adjacent to Kai Tak Cruise Terminal has commenced to provide about 10 000 units in the coming months by phase
 - An addition of at least 20 000 units will be built on five pieces of land owned by the Government and lent by the private developers in Lok Ma Chau Loop, Yuen Long and Tsing Yi

Enhancing capacity for “early isolation” by ramping up community isolation and treatment facilities (cont’d)

- The Government is following up other venues offered by developers, universities, charitable organisations, etc. for setting up additional community isolation and treatment facilities
- To address the public demand for community isolation facilities –
 - Every government department will use the premises under its management as far as possible for isolation of the civil servants or public officers who test positive for COVID-19. For instance, the Correctional Services Department has vacated Cape Collinson Correctional Institution in Chai Wan (previously used as a scenario training venue for staff) and Sha Tsui Correctional Institution on Lantau Island; the Marine Department is considering making use of China Ferry Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui
 - Universities, self-financing post-secondary education institutions, the Vocational Training Council, MTR Corporation, social welfare organisations, etc. are also planning to arrange appropriate facilities for isolating relevant confirmed patients (e.g. students, staff members and service users)

Enhancing capacity for “early treatment”

- When compared with other strains, Omicron shows milder symptoms. Currently, a total of 49 confirmed cases of patients in serious or critical conditions are being treated in hospitals, which is still within the handling capacity of public hospitals
- Currently, all public hospitals, including North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre (i.e. the makeshift hospital of about 820 beds constructed earlier with the full support of the Central Authorities), provide more than 3 000 isolation beds in total, and the Community Treatment Facility located in AsiaWorld-Expo provides about 1 000 beds
- The Central Authorities have agreed to assign a Mainland construction team to build a hospital for emergency use in Lok Ma Chau Loop
- To prevent the elderly who seek medical consultation from getting stranded at the outdoor tents due to public hospitals' A&E departments being overloaded, the Government, in collaboration with social welfare organisations, has set up treatment and holding centres to specifically receive elderly patients referred by the Hospital Authority. The first one in operation is located at Choi Wing Road Sports Centre in Kwun Tong, whereas another one is planned to be set up at Shek Kip Mei Park Sports Centre in late February

Strictly preventing the importation of cases

- In view of the severe epidemic situation in Hong Kong and the disease is still ravaging the world, the current place-specific flight suspension mechanism for nine countries (i.e. Australia, Canada, France, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) will be extended until April 20. The Government will continue to review the epidemic situation across the globe and make adjustments to its measures as and when required
- The flight-specific suspension mechanism invoked by imported cases or other causes will continue

Further tightening social distancing measures

- The Vaccine Pass arrangement will be implemented in all catering businesses and scheduled premises from February 24
- The social distancing measures to be expired on February 23 midnight will be extended, by cycle of 14 days each, until April 20. The maximum number of people per table for dine-in services at lunchtime and the requirement for mask-wearing outdoors will be further tightened. The Food and Health Bureau will announce details in due course

Increasing vaccination rate at full steam to reduce severe and fatal cases

- Willingness to get vaccinated among members of the public has increased
 - 1st dose: 5.82 million (around 86.4% of the eligible population)
 - 2nd dose: 5.12 million (76%)
 - 3rd dose: 1.49 million
- The Government has continuously increased the vaccination capacity to enable more members of the public to receive jabs as soon as possible. The average daily vaccination capacity will be increased to more than 85 000 doses by end February
 - From mid-February until now, 10 more vaccination stations have been set up
 - Over 1 000 private clinics have been mobilised to boost the vaccination rate and help district organisations to provide outreach vaccination services
 - 13 Hospital COVID-19 Vaccination Stations will extend opening hours to provide services from Monday to Saturday starting from 26 February

Increasing vaccination rate at full steam to reduce severe and fatal cases (cont'd)

- Overall goals –
 - 1st dose: vaccination rate to reach 90% in early March
 - 2nd dose: vaccination rate to reach 80% in mid-March
 - 3rd dose: Nearly half (46%) of the eligible people (i.e. six months after receiving the 2nd dose) have received the 3rd dose, while about 70% (67%) of the eligible people aged 60 or above have received the 3rd dose. Experts have in principle agreed to shorten the interval between the 2nd and 3rd doses to accelerate vaccination to enhance protection for people

Increasing vaccination rate at full steam to reduce severe and fatal cases (cont'd)

- Vaccination for children aged 3 to 11 –
 - Current vaccination rate (1st dose): 101 000 doses (19.14%)
 - Target vaccination capacity: 90% in mid-April
 - Students can receive vaccination through school outreach services, group arrangements by reservation at Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs), or go to CVCs by themselves to get vaccinated as soon as possible

Increasing vaccination rate at full steam to reduce severe and fatal cases (cont'd)

- Vaccination for residential care homes for the elderly/residential care homes for persons with disabilities –
 - Current vaccination rate: 34%
 - Target: 90% not later than April
 - Deploy resources of healthcare organisations to residential care homes as a priority; the number of residents receiving their 1st dose through the Assess and Vaccinate Programme increased substantially to about 3 600 in the recent week, up by more than 10 times compared with the weekly average of about 240 previously

All sectors of society join hands with Government in combating epidemic

- We sincerely thank the various sectors of the community for responding to our call to join the robust anti-epidemic team of the HKSAR Government, for example:
 - **Medical sector:** provide curative service for patients and assist in vaccinating residents of residential care homes for the elderly; HA is working with private hospitals to transfer some patients to the latter for treatment
 - **Chinese medicine sector:** work with the Government and HA to support members of the public under/pending quarantine and isolation; the Chinese medicine clinics of Hong Kong Baptist University provide online advisory and consultation services for confirmed patients and Chinese medicines free of charge
 - **Private testing contractors:** support the various testing operations of the Government
 - **Cross-disciplinary team of The University of Hong Kong and testing laboratories:** support the Government's sewage surveillance
 - **Property management sector:** support those people undergoing home quarantine under the Government's "StayHomeSafe" Scheme
 - **Hotel sector:** rent commercial hotels to the Government as community isolation facilities

All sectors of society join hands with Government in combating epidemic (cont'd)

- **Taxi industry and trades of non-franchised bus and public light bus:** provide designated fleets to transport those with mild or no symptoms to designated clinics/community isolation facilities
 - **Universities and self-financing post-secondary institutions:** reserve part of their campuses for setting up testing or vaccination facilities, turn dormitories into isolation facilities for people in need, and arrange staff and students to participate in anti-epidemic work
 - **Community service groups:** mobilise volunteers to pack and distribute rapid test kits, maintain order at testing stations, assist the elderly and ethnic minority groups to make online reservation for testing, vaccination and so forth
 - **Retired civil servants and health workers:** support the various anti-epidemic efforts of the Government and HA
- Commercial sector –
 - Respond to the Government's appeal and arrange staff to work from home
 - Donate cash or supplies to give full support for anti-epidemic work
 - The Government also appeals to property developers and landlords to offer rent concession to their commercial tenants, especially small and medium-sized enterprises

All sectors of society join hands with Government in combating epidemic (cont'd)

- The Government is amending the Employment Ordinance to balance the interests of employers and employees on the premise of fighting the epidemic –
 - to make it clear that absence of an employee who is subject to quarantine and unable to return to work can be regarded as sick leave, and an eligible employee is entitled to sickness allowance from the employer to reflect the policy intent
 - to stipulate that it will be regarded as unreasonable dismissal if an employee is dismissed because he/she needs to be subject to compulsory quarantine
 - to stipulate that it will not be regarded as unreasonable dismissal if an employer dismisses an employee who refuses to receive the COVID-19 vaccination without full medical justification
- The Government appeals to employers to facilitate employees' undergoing testing in a timely manner in the course of CUT

Public support and co-operation crucial to anti-epidemic fight

- Strongly appeal to all members of the public:
 - to continue to comply with social distancing measures
 - to avoid going out unnecessarily and joining gatherings or activities with many participants or other families
 - to follow the requirements of RTD, CTN and the soon-to-be-launched CUT to undergo testing in a timely manner
 - for employers of foreign domestic helpers (FDH): to discuss the rest day arrangements with their FDHs and appeal to them to avoid gatherings (including those held in boarding facilities) on their rest days and holidays amid the current special circumstances
 - to pay attention to personal hygiene to reduce the risk of infection. People having doubt about their own health conditions or with high exposure risks should take a rapid test as soon as possible for early identification of infection, if any
 - to get vaccinated as soon as possible and arrange the elderly and children of your family for vaccination
 - to stay confident and avoid being over anxious, and to communicate with family members and relatives by phone, email and social media more frequently

Public support and co-operation crucial to anti-epidemic fight (cont'd)

- It is incumbent upon the Government to provide prompt and accurate information –
 - RTHK 32 as anti-epidemic-related information station
 - pamphlet on Vaccine Pass to be distributed to every household
 - pamphlet on anti-epidemic tips to be distributed to every household next week
 - news.gov.hk, YouTube, Tamar Talk, press releases
- Principal Officials-in-charge to take turns to meet the press on their work progress



“Hope propels a society forward, and confidence is the foundation of hope. In the past three years, Hong Kong experienced unprecedented political and social unrest and four waves of the epidemic. With the support of the Central Authorities and the efforts of all sectors in the community, Hong Kong has overcome the difficulties encountered and transformed from chaos to governance. Today, with the staunch support of the Central Authorities as before, as long as Hong Kong people stand together, we will be able to overcome the epidemic and see the rainbow after the storm!”

Carrie Lam
Chief Executive
February 22, 2022