





Chapter III

Together, We Fight the Virus

My Belief

Any fight against a pandemic will only succeed if actions are guided by science and evidence and is supported by solidarity at the national, regional and territory levels. Politicisation must be strongly resisted.

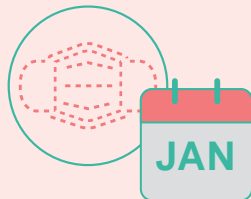
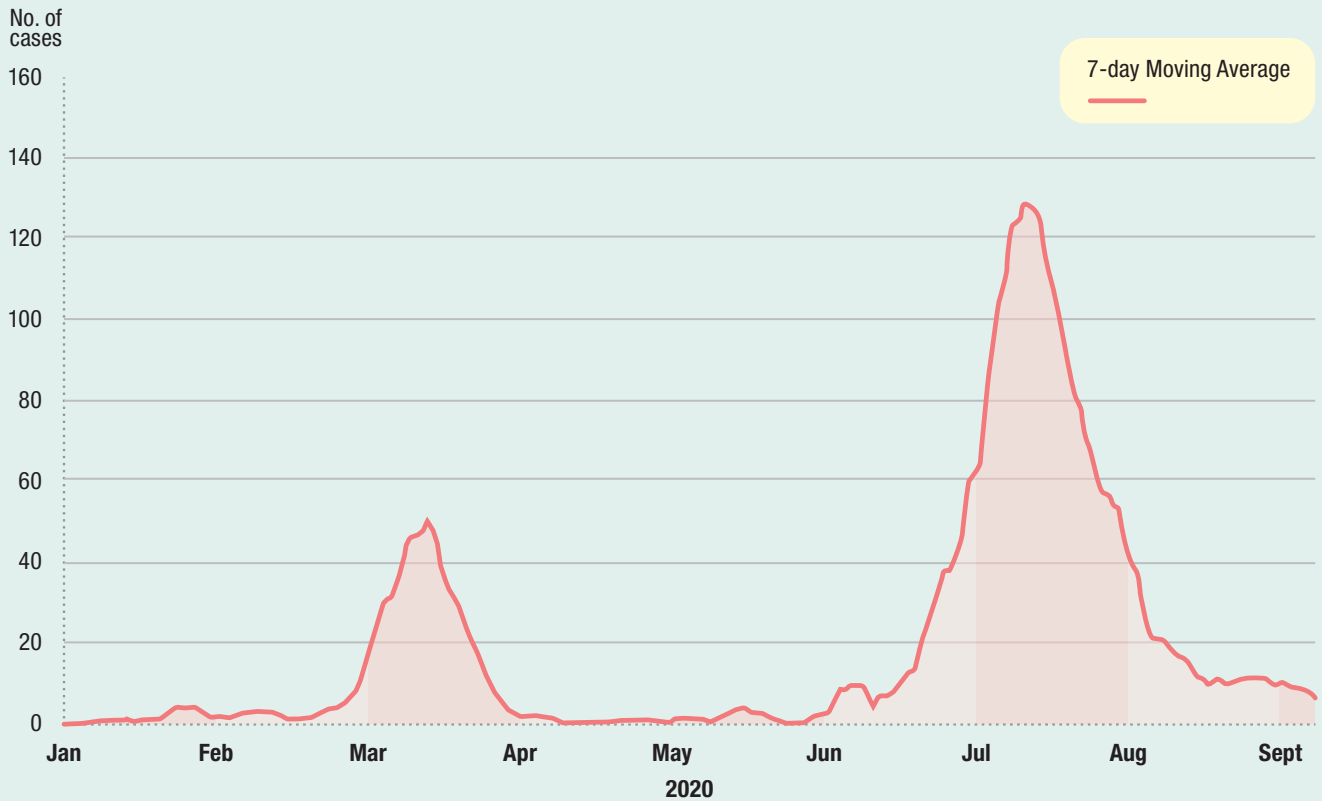
Hong Kong has been extensively affected by the Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19), a pandemic sweeping across the world. In the past eight months, Hong Kong people have shown their determination and perseverance in overcoming the difficulties and disruptions caused by the social distancing measures and border control restrictions.

Hong Kong has a robust system for fighting epidemics and has gone through the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak. Much has been improved in the hardware and technology to tackle the current public health crisis but we are consolidating our experiences and are sparing no effort in making improvements.

The local economy has been hard hit by the epidemic and is facing unprecedented challenges. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government is standing shoulder to shoulder with the community in this battle. We have announced in the 2020–21 Budget and implemented through three rounds of Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) a full array of measures to support enterprises, preserve jobs and relieve people's burden. We have gone through three waves of the epidemic and are enhancing Hong Kong's capacity to confront the next wave. There is no room for complacency.

During this difficult period, the Central Government has shown great care for Hong Kong in all aspects, ranging from assistance in substantially ramping up our virus testing capability, providing supplies of hospital beds and equipment to the Hospital Authority (HA), to facilitating the completion of the community treatment facility (CTF) at AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) within a few weeks. The Central Government will further support the HKSAR Government to expand the CTF in AWE and build a temporary hospital nearby to cope with future outbreak.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong



There was hardly any local production of masks in Hong Kong in **January** 2020.

20 production lines

subsidised under the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme have committed to a monthly supply of



34 million masks

to the Government



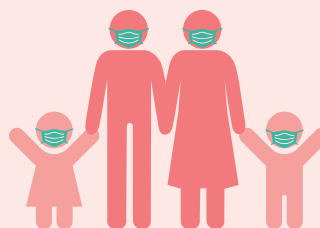
7.6 million masks

to the local market

Through the Hong Kong Productivity Council, the Government provided technical advice to facilitate the **establishment of**

another 35 production

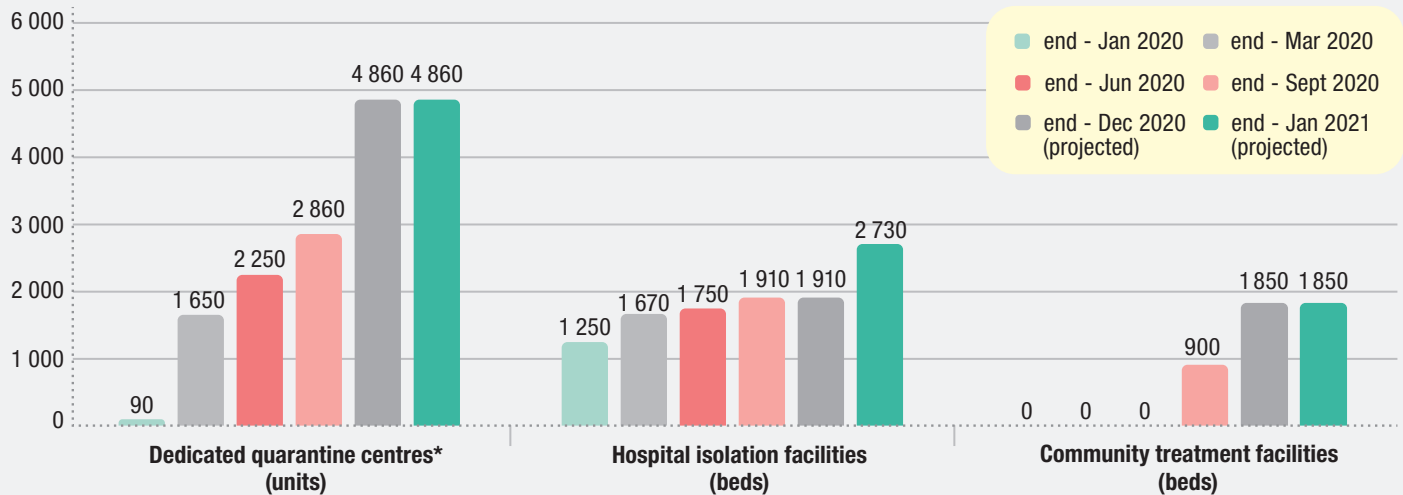
lines in Hong Kong.



There is now an abundant supply of masks in the local market, with an estimated production capacity of over

100 million masks per month.

Capacity of Quarantine, Isolation and Treatment Facilities



* Including from end-Sep 2020 onwards 640 beds at the dedicated quarantine facility at the AsiaWorld-Expo for residents of residential care homes for the elderly/persons with disabilities.



Testing capacity

The testing capacity of the public sector progressively increases from about **3 600 tests per day** in late June to over **7 000 tests per day**.

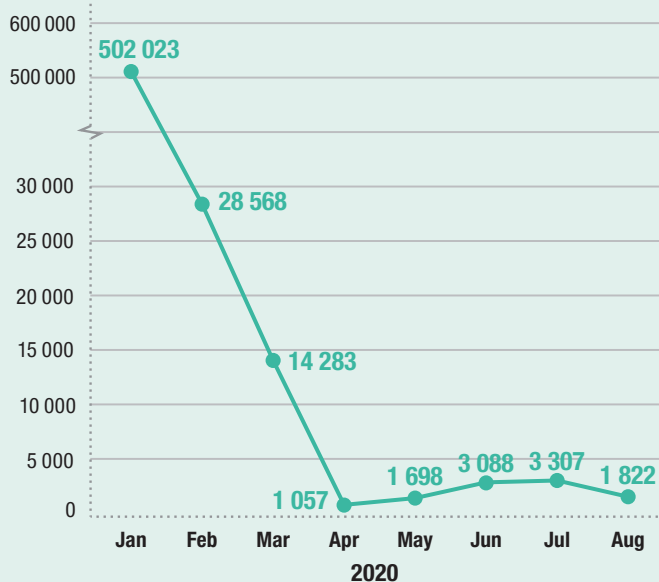


Number of regulations made under Cap. 599

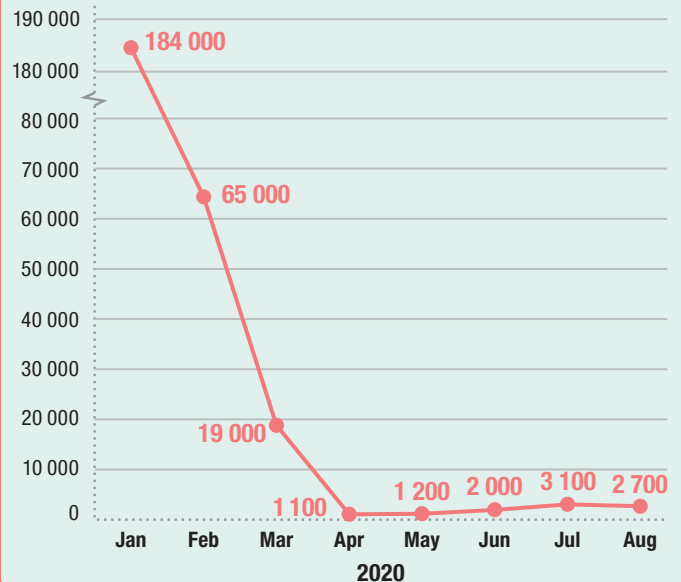
7 regulations: Cap. 599C to Cap. 599I are made in response to **COVID-19**.



Daily average number of passengers at land boundary control points[^]



Daily average number of passengers at Hong Kong International Airport[#]



[^] In response to the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, the passenger clearance services at the following land boundary control points were suspended by phases starting from the end of January 2020:

- West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, Hung Hom, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok (with effect from 30 January 2020); and
- Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line and Lok Ma Chau (with effect from 4 February 2020).

Only the passenger clearance facilities at Shenzhen Bay and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port remain open.

[#] Traffic of July to August 2020 is provisional.

Measures Taken

Hong Kong's prevention and control work against COVID-19 started immediately upon notification of Department of Health (DH) by National Health Commission (NHC) about the situation in Wuhan on 31 December 2019. The Government has since taken measures to fight the pandemic under the three principles of speedy response in light of the situation, moving ahead of the times to prepare for the worse and operating in an open and transparent manner.

The key measures taken include:

Leadership

- Included the disease as a scheduled disease under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) on 8 January 2020 upon notification from NHC, and raised the COVID-19 response level to the highest-level "Emergency" on 25 January 2020 upon confirming the first infection case, with the Chief Executive chairing the inter-departmental Steering Committee-cum-Command Centre to formulate strategies and measures in light of the development of the disease. Twenty-two meetings of the Steering Committee have been held up to end-September 2020 in addition to many more core group and subject group meetings. (FHB)
- The Chief Executive appointed four experts: Professor Gabriel Leung, Professor Keiji Fukuda, Professor Yuen Kwok-yung and Professor David Hui on 25 January 2020 to advise the Government on various aspects of the anti-epidemic work. Up till end-September 2020, 17 meetings of the Expert Advisory Panel have been held in addition to many individual consultations. (FHB)

- Maintained close liaison with the NHC as well as health authorities in the Guangdong Province and Macao SAR Government. (FHB)
- Made regular reports to the Executive Council whose endorsement is required for the making of regulations under (Cap. 599). (FHB)
- Adopted the "Suppress and Lift" strategy by implementing and constantly adjusting various social distancing and border control measures to reduce the risk of importation and transmission of the virus in the community, having regard to three considerations, namely: (i) public health protection; (ii) economic impact on Hong Kong; and (iii) social acceptance. (FHB)

Transparency

- Conveyed updated and accurate messages to the public speedily and effectively via senior officials' press conferences, Centre for Health Protection and HA daily press briefings; a dedicated government webpage (coronavirus.gov.hk) to provide integrated and one-stop information; and simple and easy-to-understand text and data via social media. In the past nine months, about 400 press conferences/briefings have been held, about 2 000 press releases issued and over 4 000 posts released via social media on COVID-19. (FHB)
- The Chief Executive released monthly reports on the Government's work in fighting the virus. A total of eight such reports have been issued so far. (CEO)
- Launched the Local Situation Dashboard in collaboration with the Smart City Consortium to provide the public with the latest information on local COVID-19 cases. The Dashboard has more than 37 million views. (ITB)

Testing, Quarantine, Treatment Facilities and Contact Tracing

- Adopted a three-pronged approach in testing to achieve “early identification, early isolation and early treatment” and prevent community transmission of the virus by asymptomatic patients: (i) ongoing testing for epidemiological surveillance conducted by DH and HA; (ii) targeted group testing progressively implemented by the Government since mid-July 2020; and (iii) the Universal Community Testing Programme (UCTP). To meet the testing requirement, testing capacity in public and private sectors has been significantly ramped up. (FHB)
- Offered to all citizens a free virus testing service from 1 to 14 September 2020 with the support of the Central Government. A total of about 1 783 000 specimens had been collected under the UCTP for COVID-19 nucleic acid test. (FHB, CSB)
- Offered to targeted groups that are of higher-risk, high-exposure and from important infrastructure services free virus testing services on a voluntary basis since mid-July 2020. A total of over 517 000 samples had been tested under the Targeted Group Testing Scheme. (Relevant bureaux)
- Enhanced surveillance and arranged COVID-19 testing by HA for all inpatients newly admitted to public hospitals, and extended the arrangement of distribution of specimen collection packs to 46 general outpatient clinics since end-September 2020 to facilitate individuals to undergo testing. (FHB)
- Implemented measures to enhance service capacity and ensure proper care of COVID-19 patients in HA, including deploying around 1 250 Tier-1 isolation beds and retrofitting certain general wards into standard negative pressure wards to provide around 660 Tier-2 isolation beds to address the increase in service demand. (FHB)
- Set up the CTF with 900 beds in AWE to provide triage and isolation for confirmed patients with mild symptoms and in stable condition. (FHB)
- Set up designated quarantine facilities at the Hong Kong Jockey Club PHAB Camp in Pok Fu Lam, the Helping Hand Cheung Muk Tau Holiday Centre for the Elderly in Sai Kung, and the AWE to look after residents of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities (RCHE/RCHD) who are close contacts of confirmed cases. (FHB)
- Launched the Special Chinese Medicine Out-patient Programme in the Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres in April 2020 to provide free Chinese medicine out-patient rehabilitation services to discharged persons who have received COVID-19 treatment. (FHB)
- Gazetted the legislative amendments in August 2020 to extend the power currently given to health officer under Prevention and Control of Disease (Disclosure of Information) Regulation (Cap. 599D) to other authorised officers taking part in contact tracing. Suitable public officers will be seconded to the contact tracing team to enhance manpower support as needed. (FHB)

Application of Technology

- Jointly developed the electronic wristband and “StayHomeSafe” mobile application with local research and development institutes, universities and start-ups to help ascertain that persons under home quarantine are staying at the designated place. They have so far been used on over 280 000 people, representing the largest scale of such application in the world. (ITB)
- Completed 118 additional quarantine units at Chai Wan Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village in less than one month using the Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) method. Subsequently, another 1 950 quarantine units were provided at Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre, Pat Heung Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre and a site at Penny’s Bay also using MiC method. (DEVB)
- Funded 49 COVID-19 related research projects undertaken by universities at a total cost of \$170 million under the Health and Medical Research Fund. (FHB)

Distance Business Programme

- Launched a time-limited programme to support private enterprises with business continuation through adoption of information technology (IT) solutions in areas like cyber security, digital payment, virtual meeting, remote document management, etc., under the second round of AEF. (ITB)

Anti-epidemic Measures to Relieve Hardship

- Launched different measures totalling over \$300 billion to help businesses stay afloat, keep workers in employment, relieve the financial burden of individuals and businesses and assist the economy to recover once the epidemic is contained. Measures include:
 - three rounds of measures under the AEF, and other epidemic related measures amounting to about \$191 billion; and
 - a relief package of over \$120 billion in the 2020–21 Budget. (Relevant bureaux)
- Launched the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme to stabilise market supply of surgical masks. The 20 subsidised production lines have committed a monthly supply of some 34 million masks to the Government and some 7.6 million masks to the local market. (CEDB)
- Distributed two rounds of reusable CuMask+™ and another 34 million surgical masks to citizens free of charge, some 30 million surgical masks to elderly homes, frontline workers in government contracts and other vulnerable groups; and around 6 million donated masks to the needy through non-governmental organisations. (ITB, CEDB, HAB, LWB, FHB)

New Initiatives

Surveillance, Testing and Contact Tracing

Strengthening Testing Capacity to Prepare for Another Surge

- Encourage and assist private laboratories in Hong Kong to enhance COVID-19 testing capacity to meet the future travelling needs of inbound and outbound passengers, increase accessibility and improve affordability. The current private sector testing capacity has already reached several tens of thousands a day. (FHB)
- Enhance testing capacity in the public sector. DH's satellite laboratory at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital and the new laboratories at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong have been set up. They together with other measures will progressively increase the testing capacity of the public sector from about 3 600 tests per day in late-June to over 7 000 tests per day. DH will also procure testing services from local private laboratories if necessary. (FHB)

Exploiting Information Technology to Enhance Contact Tracing

- Improve the efficiency of contact tracing operations and ensure timely release of information on confirmed cases to the public through appropriate platforms using IT. An internal information portal specifically designed for contact tracing will be developed to link up various relevant departments, agencies and existing information systems for centrally and electronically collecting information needed for contact tracing. (FHB, ITB)

- Develop a voluntary exposure notification system for targeted trades and premises. (ITB)

Border Control Measures

- Relax entry control and quarantine arrangements for travellers between Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, as well as between the Hong Kong and Macao SARs with a view to gradually resuming normal cross-boundary activities without compromising public health, through mutual recognition of COVID-19 tests via a health code. (FHB, CMAB)
- Review and streamline the boundary crossing workflow including quarantine, immigration and customs clearance processes at boundary control points, with a view to integrating necessary epidemic prevention and control measures and ensuring safe and smooth cross-boundary flows when travelling gradually resumes. (FHB)
- Enter into discussions with overseas places to facilitate the establishment of travel bubbles. (CEDB, FHB)

Quarantine, Isolation and Treatment Facilities

- Complete the construction of Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre Phases III and IV in December 2020 for provision of another 2 000 quarantine units. By then, Hong Kong will have a total of over 4 000 units for dedicated quarantine purpose. In case there is another surge before the additional quarantine units are put into operation, the Government has engaged hotels providing up to 1 000 guestrooms to cater for the needs of close contacts as quarantine hotels. (FHB, DEVB)

- Assist HA to establish more community treatment and isolation facilities. With the support of the Central Government, further expand CTF in AWE to provide an extra 1 000 additional beds to a total of around 1 900 beds, some of which are equipped with negative pressure facilities. (FHB, DEVB)
- With the Central Government's assistance, construct a temporary hospital on a three-hectare piece of land near AWE to provide negative pressure wards that can accommodate over 800 beds. (FHB, DEVB)

Preventive Measures

- Procure vaccines meeting the requirements of safety, efficacy and quality for the Hong Kong population for safeguarding the health of our citizens. (FHB)
- Fund and support all subvented, contract, self-financing and private RCHEs and RCHDs to apply anti-virus coating on their premises under the AEF. (LWB)
- Enhance anti-epidemic work in public markets, including stepping up cleaning and disinfection, installing body temperature checking system, improving air ventilation and market toilets, and adopting anti-microbial coating technology to improve hygiene of various public markets. (FHB)
- Provide a one-off subsidy to tenants of public markets under the AEF to promote contactless payment in public market stalls to safeguard public health. (FHB, THB)
- Use robots for terminal patrol, cleansing and environmental monitoring at the airport. (THB)

- Encourage wider application of anti-microbial technology in public transport. (THB)
- Carry out inspection of communal/external drainage pipes for buildings in estates/courts under the Hong Kong Housing Authority's rental housing and various subsidised sale flats schemes and step up various anti-epidemic measures in public rental housing estates and shopping centres/markets. (THB)

Adjustment to Hospital Services Provision in light of COVID-19

Telemedicine

- Continue to change HA's service model where practicable and provide services for patients using video conferencing technologies. (FHB)
- Provide telehealth services for elderly persons living in remote areas through the installation of relevant facilities at village offices and the use of e-payment. (ITB, FHB)

Support for Chronic Disease Patients in the Mainland

- Implement a support scheme for the chronic disease patients who are unable to return to Hong Kong to receive their scheduled medical consultation in HA due to immigration restriction under COVID-19. Eligible patients would receive regular general or specialist consultation sessions at The University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital up to July 2021 or until the lapse of the quarantine arrangement of both sides, whichever is earlier. (FHB)

Hospital Development

- Review the design of hospital projects under the two 10-year Hospital Development Plans taking into account the experience in combating COVID-19 and incorporate required provisions for general wards in individual hospitals to be readily converted into Tier-2 isolation wards for use in epidemic situation. (FHB)
- Promote the wider use of new technologies in public hospitals, including piloting the use of location-based services and navigation technology in selected public hospitals, the Bed Booking System for Convalescent/Rehabilitation Beds and the Blood Taking Scheduling System in selected Specialist Out-patient Clinics starting from March 2021. (FHB, ITB)

e-Learning

- Continue to use the Community Care Fund to support needy students in primary and secondary schools to purchase mobile computer devices for e-learning through schools. It is expected that about 100 000 students in 800 schools will benefit from the programme in the 2020/21 school year, representing a three-time increase in the total number of beneficiary students of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years. (EDB)
- Reserve \$10 million for application by schools to purchase portable WiFi routers and mobile data cards for needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services, so as to implement e-learning under the “new normal”. (EDB)

- Encourage schools to actively apply for funding under the Priority Themes and the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools of the Quality Education Fund (QEF) to support e-learning and the blended mode of teaching under the “new normal”, as well as to enhance support for schools and teachers. (EDB)
- Reserve \$2 billion in the QEF to launch a three-year programme to assist schools to continue to implement the blended mode of learning and teaching, to ensure that students with limited economic means would have equal access to quality education under the “new normal”. (EDB)
- Work with the Hong Kong Education City in the 2020/21 school year to explore and build a more comprehensive and user-friendly teaching resources sharing platform to facilitate gainful use of the learning and teaching resources in the Education Bureau’s website and in the Hong Kong Education City, as well as to encourage teachers to share quality learning resources. (EDB)

Anti-epidemic Measures to Relieve Hardship

- Continue to implement those outstanding AEF measures to provide support to businesses and individuals. (Relevant bureaux)