

CHINA

Experts say HK needs mainland to aid virus fight

SAR reports record-breaking 113 new infections as 3rd outbreak sweeps city

By LI BINGCUN and AZAM KHAN in Hong Kong

Hong Kong further tightened pandemic precautionary measures on Wednesday as the city reported a record-breaking 113 new coronavirus cases, including 105 local transmissions.

In the face of skyrocketing cases, medical experts suggested authorities accept the mainland's help to boost testing capacity in order to halt the transmission chain in the city as the sources of 63 of the new infections are unknown.

Recent cases with unknown sources showed an invisible transmission chain in the community, indicating a "very high" risk of large-scale community outbreak, Secretary for Food and Health Sophia Chan Siu-chee told a news conference on Wednesday afternoon.

In response to the outbreak, the SAR government announced it would expand mandatory face mask regulations in all indoor public venues, public transportation terminals and transit areas.

The new rule will take effect on Thursday and remain in force for two weeks. Violators face a maximum fine of HK\$5,000.

Meanwhile, the government also extended the mandatory quarantine period for arrivals from the mainland to Sept 7. The quarantine rule for overseas arrivals as well as bans on operations of certain public venues and gatherings of more than eight people have been extended to Dec 31.

So far, the city has reported 2,131 coronavirus cases and 14 deaths. Hong Kong is experiencing a third wave of coronavirus infections, with more than one-third of those cases recorded this month.

Chan also confirmed that the mainland, which has attached great importance to the situation in Hong Kong, has offered to help.

To cope with the new outbreak, the government has recently collaborated with two mainland companies to conduct free tests for

around 400,000 people in the city's four hardest-hit sectors — staff members in elderly care centers, catering, property management companies and taxi drivers.

The companies — Beijing Genomics Institution and China Inspection Company Limited, both of which have laboratories in Hong Kong — were called in to help with the massive testing.

Their involvement has significantly improved the city's testing capacity, which was restricted by limited manpower and machinery, Chan said.

It was reported that the lab run by the Beijing Genomics Institution can test around 5,000 samples per day — about half of the city's testing capacity — and produce results within half a day.

Infectious diseases expert Tsang Kay-yan said the pandemic may last for another six to eight weeks and the increasing daily spike is expected to place more pressure on local virus testing agencies, which are already strained.

He added that to effectively contain the coronavirus, the city's daily testing capacity needs to reach about 50,000, far more than its current capability.

To ease the pressure on local agencies, he encouraged the government to collaborate with leading firms from the mainland, which perform well in efficiency and cost control.

Leung Chi-chiu, chairman of the Advisory Committee on Communicable Diseases under the Hong Kong Medical Association, told China Daily that the imminent task now is to improve virus testing capacity to prevent "disastrous" consequences.

Mainland testing agencies based in Hong Kong and those located in Shenzhen, which borders the SAR, could all be considered as possible collaboration partners, Leung suggested.

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An environmental maintenance vehicle disinfects a street in the Tianshan district of Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Monday. ZHAO GE / XINHUA

Urumqi tests over 1 million people

By MAO WEIHUA and AYBEK ASKHAR in Urumqi

Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, has completed nucleic acid tests for more than 1 million people as of Tuesday since it began a free mass test campaign across the city on July 18, city officials said during a virus control and prevention conference on Wednesday.

"As of Tuesday, the citizens of Tianshan district, a downtown area in Urumqi where the first confirmed case of COVID-19 infection was found, and over 340,000 people in Shaybak district have completed the test," said Shang Yulan, deputy secretary-general of the city's government, adding that the remaining areas are ready and gradually starting testing.

Shang said the regional government dispatched leaders at the regional and city levels to take charge of 24 testing organizations in the citywide campaign.

Urumqi reported nine locally transmitted COVID-19 infections and 14 asymptomatic cases on Tuesday, bringing the total confirmed cases to 62 and asymptomatic cases to 69 in the city since the outbreak of the virus on July 15.

Rui Baoling, head of the city's disease control and prevention center, said the center has implemented a mixed sampling method, which puts the samples from the upper respiratory tracts of five people into one sampling tube for the laboratory test.



Medical workers prepare to take throat swabs from residents for COVID-19 testing at a community in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Tuesday. CHEN YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"The method was taken in order to further improve the ability and efficiency of the test, and during the test, we will pay special attention to the registration of personal information," Rui said.

Rui said if a positive result is found in the mixed sample, the center will quickly find the group of five people for resampling and screening.

Meanwhile, to ensure the smooth and orderly supply of daily needs, Urumqi has set up more than 2,000 temporary food and service centers for people who have had to stay at home.

"We will purchase whatever the residents need," said Adil Abduraxit, deputy director of a residential community in Tianshan district.

New case in Dalian

Also on Wednesday, Dalian, a coastal city in Liaoning province, reported a locally transmitted COVID-19 case, according to China Central Television.

The patient, surnamed Shi, 58, is an employee of a seafood processing company in the city who lives alone in Xigang district. He developed symptoms including fever and fatigue on July 16 and went to hospital for treatment on Tuesday. He tested positive on Wednesday morning and was sent to a hospital designated to treat COVID-19 cases. All of his close contacts have been quarantined.

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Mauritian doctor helps treat cases in Zhejiang

By MA ZHENHUA in Hangzhou mazhenhuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Sumayyah Hosany, a Mauritian doctor, decided to stay in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in February while COVID-19 was rapidly spreading throughout China.

Together with her husband Hamad Abdul Zahir, a Pakistani doctor, she did all she could to help locals fight the epidemic.

"I'm really proud that I've got the chance to give back," Sumayyah said.

Sumayyah, 31, came to China at the age of 18. She studied at Wenzhou Medical University for eight years and obtained a master's degree in clinical medicine.



Sumayyah Hosany

She and her husband now work at Panhealth Medical Center in Wenzhou.

They volunteered at a highway checkpoint south of Wenzhou during the epidemic, checking travelers' IDs, taking their temperatures and inquiring about their travel history.

"We really want to do our part, no matter how small it is," Sumayyah said. "I worked with policemen, nurses, doctors from other hospitals, and people at the grassroots level. I felt a sense of connection and now I feel I'm more part of the culture and more part of the country."

"For me, as a Pakistani, since we were born, the only thing we know is the Pakistan-China friendship," Hamad said.

"Whenever we needed any kind of support, China was always standing with us and still is. All these things give warmth to your heart. So it's an honor, to be honest."

Sumayyah's parents were worried about her at first and urged her and her husband to return as soon as possible, but eventually they began supporting their decision to stay in China.

On March 18, Mauritius reported its first three confirmed cases, causing panic among the public and sparking rumors and misinformation.

Sumayyah made short videos on the basics of epidemic prevention and posted them on social media platforms to teach her friends and family back home how to protect themselves.

Sumayyah also visited the Wenzhou Central Hospital to learn about professional epidemic prevention practices and shared with doctors in Mauritius and Pakistan.

When she learned that Mauritius was in need of preventive supplies, Sumayyah turned to the Panhealth Medical Center for help and received a positive response, not only from the hospital, but also from the governments of Wenzhou and several other cities.

A batch of face masks, protective suits, goggles and temperature scanners were sent from China to Mauritius and Pakistan in April.

"COVID-19 is the enemy of all mankind," said Xue Zhihui, director of the Panhealth Medical Center in Wenzhou. "We cannot turn a blind eye to Mauritius, let alone Sumayyah's great contributions to the COVID-19 fight in Wenzhou and in China."

Guideline aims to control COVID-19 on public transportation

By WANG XIAOYU wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Passengers using public transportation are not allowed to leave a vehicle without permission if suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases or asymptomatic infections are detected in the vehicle, according to a technical guideline issued by the National Health Commission.

Effective immediately, affected passengers should follow the instructions of public transit workers and take proper protective measures.

The rule applies to all airplanes, passenger trains, intercity and city buses, rail transportation, ships

and taxis, according to a guideline released on Tuesday evening.

In addition, local disease control and prevention centers will guide efforts to determine contamination levels in the vehicles before thorough disinfection. Garbage and used items such as fabrics, pillows and bed sheets will be handled in accordance with disposal rules applied to medical waste, the guideline said.

The guideline, which lays out requirements for disinfection and personal protection on public transportation amid the COVID-19 epidemic, was one of six documents published by the commission on Tuesday to enforce standard protec-

tive measures in a bid to rein in possible new outbreaks.

Five other guidelines also clarify precautions designed for temporary quarantine or treatment facilities, lay out rules for managing air conditioning and ventilation systems in public spaces and provide guidance on personal health protocols and protective measures in public places.

China has managed to stamp out the first wave of outbreaks that hit Hubei province the hardest earlier this year, and it recently suppressed a smaller outbreak tied to a food wholesale market in Beijing.

As the country is battling a new cluster of infections that emerged

in its Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region last week, experts said sporadic cases might be common in the future, underscoring the significance of implementing regular disease control measures and taking precautions.

According to the newly-released documents, public facilities that see dense and highly mobile crowds — such as office buildings, hotels, malls, banks, restaurants and food markets — as well as institutions that are deemed at higher risk of spreading the virus — including primary and high schools, elderly care homes, prisons and mental health clinics — should all step up their preparedness for the virulent disease.

Preparations will include stocking virus control equipment, formulating emergency plans, enforcing strict temperature-taking and implementing social-distancing protocols.

In low-risk areas, these public facilities can operate normally. However, in medium- or high-risk areas, business hours will be shortened and the number of people gathering reduced.

Cinemas, theaters and karaoke bars in medium-or high-risk areas should be closed. In-person visits to elderly care homes, child welfare homes and prisons will be prohibited and replaced with virtual visits.

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Chief's roadwork, fish farming put village on anti-poverty path

By WANG QINGYUN in Chishui, Guizhou wangqingyun@chinadaily.com.cn



Tang Yongfu, Party chief of Darong village, is proud to talk about how the lives of the villagers have improved over the past decade.

Of the 258 households in the village, located in Chishui city, Guizhou province, about half own an automobile, and 139 families have purchased apartments in the city, according to Tang.

Further, disposable income per villager rose to 15,300 yuan (\$2,187) in 2019 from less than 3,000 yuan in 2009, Tang said, adding that such changes would not have been possible without the construction of roads.

Born and raised in Darong, Tang,

56, said the village was "especially impoverished" when he was young. Back then, he was living in a neighborhood on a mountain that was accessible only by foot, where people needed to travel for more than an hour down a steep muddy trail to go outside the village, and two hours to come back.

In 1989, Tang's family moved and settled in Chishui, where he started

his own business. His life changed in 2006, when he accepted an invitation by more than 20 people in his home village to help them build a road.

Construction lasted three years, during which Tang sold his furniture factory to raise money.

In 2009, villagers built a 7-kilometer road paved with broken rocks.

In 2013, they managed to renovate the road with concrete using a grant from the government, making it the first road with a hard surface in the village, according to Tang.

Since then, the government has renovated more than 130 kilometers of roads in the village, allowing every family to enjoy hard-surface roads at their doorstep, Tang said.

Like many other villages in Chishui, Darong is surrounded by forests teeming with bamboo,

something that can be used to make paper, furniture and handicrafts.

With all those roads, Darong villagers are able to transport their bamboo products out of the village much faster and make much more money, Tang said.

Besides bamboo, fish farming has become a major source of income for the villagers as a result of Tang's entrepreneurship.

In 2010, he purchased 35 kilograms of fish, which were raised in a local family's paddy field. Tang said he paid them 700 yuan for the fish, a boon for the family who would usually earn a meager income a year selling the rice they harvested.

"That was when I was inspired and thought maybe we could develop the fish farming industry," he said.

In 2010, Tang started raising fish

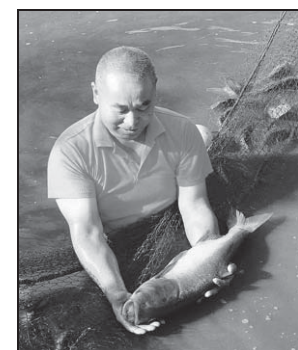
in a deserted reservoir and encouraged others to join him.

But his idea was rejected by most villagers who had never raised fish before and were concerned that turning their cropland into fish ponds might reduce their food supply. Only 16 families accepted his proposal.

In June 2012, while Tang was struggling to sell the fish, a flood damaged all the fish ponds in the village and washed the fish down the mountain.

That moment of despair, however, turned out to be an opportunity for Tang to develop a market.

People in neighboring towns picked up the fish that fell down the cliff, cooked them and found that they taste good, Tang said, adding that a number of people contacted him to order fish later that year.



Tang Yongfu holds a fish in his fish pond in Chishui, Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 2014, Tang made a profit of more than 200,000 yuan selling fish, luring more villagers to join the business.

Now the village has 102 families raising fish, making 4.6 million yuan a year, he said.