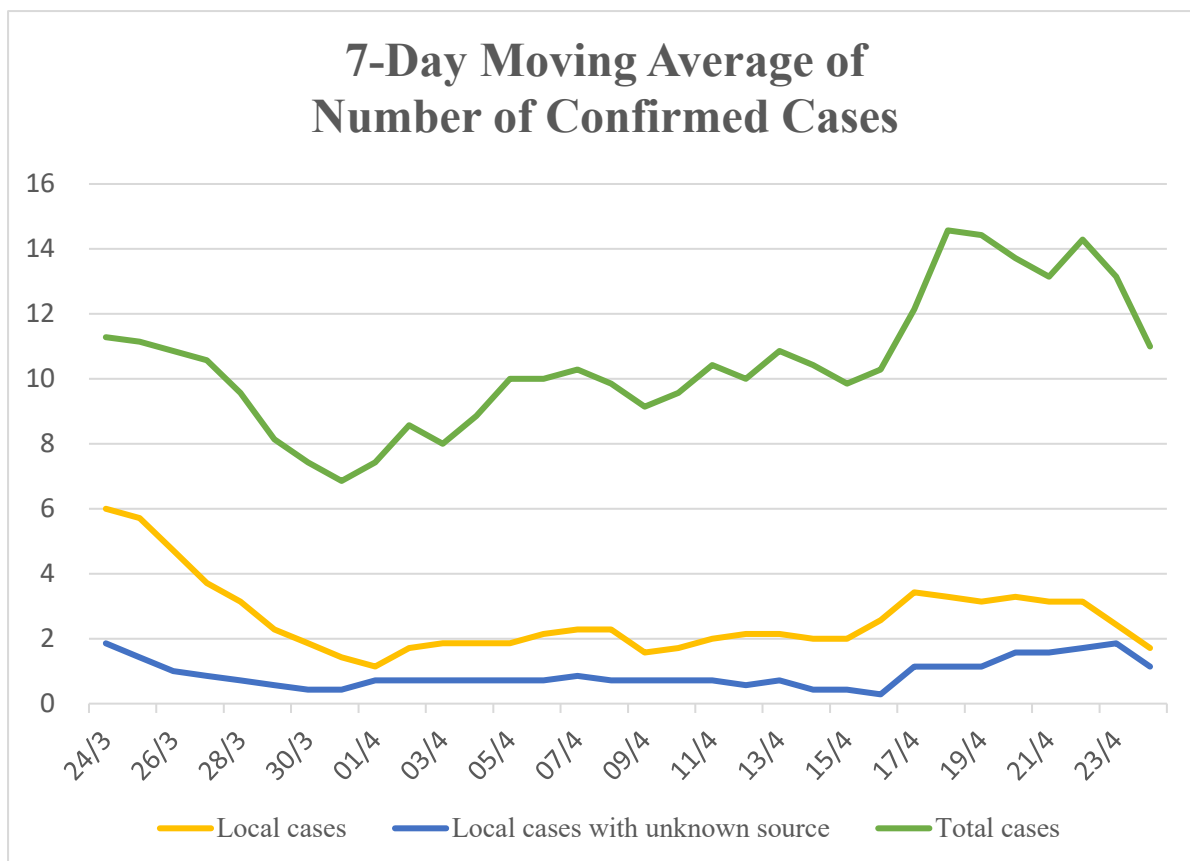


## **A New Direction in Fighting the Pandemic**

In the past month, the number of confirmed cases worldwide has continued to rise, with the death toll exceeding three million. Fortunately, the epidemic situation in Hong Kong has been generally stable. The number of local cases has remained at a very low level and the fourth wave of the epidemic is evidently under control. Taking into account our enhanced anti-epidemic capabilities and with the Government's Vaccination Programme moving forward steadily, I announced a new direction in fighting the pandemic a fortnight ago with the aim of restoring the normal operation of society and people's daily lives as far as possible while keeping the epidemic situation effectively in check. However, the success of this roadmap for fighting the pandemic still depends on everyone's efforts.

### The latest epidemic situation

As of April 25, the total number of confirmed cases in April was 269; over 80 per cent of them were imported cases. The number of daily local cases has remained at low single-digits, with zero local cases reported on four occasions, indicating that the epidemic situation is generally under control. No large infection clusters, which we were worried about due to the increase in people's social activities during the Easter holiday, have appeared. However, the detection of the first confirmed case involving the N501Y mutant virus strain in the community in mid-April is deeply concerning. The Centre for Health Protection has remained vigilant by strictly implementing contact tracing, testing and quarantine measures. So far, the mutant virus strain has not spread widely in the community, but we will continue to closely monitor the situation.



### Anti-epidemic efforts

Having regard to the easing of the epidemic situation, we have suitably adjusted social distancing measures (e.g. reopening outdoor play facilities for children, swimming pools and beaches, increasing the number of people allowed in cinemas, performance venues and theme parks, etc.) as well as the quarantine requirements for people arriving in Hong Kong from overseas places (e.g. shortening the compulsory quarantine period for people arriving from low-risk places from 21 days to 14 days). Meanwhile, we have continued to make use of our enhanced capabilities to control the epidemic through strict and targeted measures. In the past month, applying the strict rule that all people in a building or in a workplace have to undergo compulsory testing if one confirmed case is found in the building or the workplace, we have issued compulsory testing notices to around 150 premises. We have also carried out “restriction-testing declaration” operations on five buildings, as well as conducted blitz enforcement actions on the

compulsory testing notices issued to four buildings, and imposed a fixed penalty of \$5,000 and/or issued a compulsory testing order to more than 20 people who have failed to comply with the notices.

Our anti-epidemic strategy and its effectiveness are well-demonstrated in our handling of the cluster of cases found in Oi Fai House (Block 3) of Yau Oi Estate in Tuen Mun. The first case in the building was found on April 7. On the same day, we issued a compulsory testing notice to require more than 900 residents in the building to undergo compulsory testing. On April 14 and 21, we issued compulsory testing notices to the building again with a view to achieving zero infection. Since other cases were found in the same building, we have arranged more than 200 residents to undergo compulsory quarantine at quarantine centres since April 8. Among the nine cases found in the building, except for the two cases with unknown sources of infection (which were found on April 7 and 8), the remaining seven cases were identified through our contact tracing of confirmed cases or during compulsory quarantine or compulsory testing and were isolated for treatment immediately. This shows that our actions have successfully cut the chain of transmission and prevented a large-scale outbreak that might have been caused by these infected persons. The testing and quarantine requirements have undoubtedly brought some inconvenience to the residents, but they are crucial in preventing the spread of the virus in the community. As far as I know, the residents have been very co-operative. Basically, all of them took the test within the timeframe specified in the compulsory testing notices and underwent quarantine. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of them for fulfilling their civic responsibility and demonstrating the spirit of fighting the virus together.

As for preventing the importation of cases, we have not let down our guard either. We tightened the flight suspension mechanism for passenger flights in mid-April. Since mutant virus strains were detected in some of the imported cases from India, Pakistan and the Philippines, we have invoked the mechanism to prohibit all passenger flights from these places from landing in Hong Kong for a period of 14

days since April 20.

The major measures introduced are set out below chronologically:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
April 1	The Government announced the arrangement of two designated flights departing London, United Kingdom on April 21 and 28 for the orderly return of Hong Kong residents there. They would be required to undergo multiple tests on specified dates and compulsory quarantine at specified quarantine facility for 21 days.
April 5	Following the arrival of a new batch of BioNTech vaccine in Hong Kong, the Government resumed the administration of BioNTech vaccine to members of the public.
April 9	The Government included Australia, New Zealand and Singapore to the low-risk group of specified places and the compulsory quarantine period for persons arriving in Hong Kong from these three places was shortened to 14 days.
April 12	The Chief Executive chaired a press conference to announce a new direction in fighting the pandemic, including adjusting various anti-epidemic measures with “vaccine bubble” as the basis and appealing to members of the public to get vaccinated sooner rather than later so that Hong Kong can gradually return to normality.

April 14	The Government tightened the passenger flight suspension mechanism and introduced in parallel a new place-specific flight suspension mechanism. Under the new mechanism, if a total of five or more passengers among all flights from the same place were confirmed by arrival tests for COVID-19 with the N501Y mutant strain within a seven-day period, all passenger flights from that place will be prohibited from landing in Hong Kong for 14 days and that place will be specified as an extremely high-risk place.
April 15	The Government announced that the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme will be expanded to cover persons aged 16 to 29 starting from April 23, rendering the city as one of the very few places in the world where all adults are covered in the vaccination programme.
April 20	The Government invoked the place-specific suspension mechanism to prohibit all passenger flights from India, Pakistan and the Philippines from landing in Hong Kong for 14 days and restrict all persons who had stayed in these places from boarding for Hong Kong.
April 21	The Hospital Authority resumed the special visiting arrangement in eight infirmary hospitals.

### New direction in fighting the pandemic

With the fourth wave of the epidemic under control, coupled with the enhancement of our anti-epidemic capabilities in various aspects and the roll-out of the vaccination programme, I consider that it is an appropriate time to adopt a new direction in fighting the pandemic. In response to the aspirations of various sectors and members of the public to resume normal lives as soon as possible, I propose four “Rs” in our new direction in fighting the pandemic:

- **Return to Normality**
- **Refrain from “stop and go” approach**
- **Reinforce infection control measures in a targeted manner**
- **Reiterate the need for concerted community efforts**

Specifically, the Government will adjust social distancing measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis. For instance, when staff members and customers of specified premises have already received vaccinations and other anti-epidemic requirements are met, the operation restrictions will be relaxed. The convenience brought about by vaccinations can also be applied to cross-boundary travel, including shortening the quarantine period of persons arriving in Hong Kong from low-risk places. The proposal has taken into account the protection offered by vaccines, while at the same time aims to provide incentives for vaccination, such that more members of the public will get vaccinated and an immune barrier can be built for Hong Kong as soon as possible. I express my heartfelt thanks to the representatives of various trades for participating in discussions with relevant departments in the past two weeks and putting forward constructive and practicable measures for implementation. Details will be announced by the Government in due course.

It should be emphasised that, while the goal of the new direction in fighting the pandemic is to return to normality, it is not tantamount to relaxation of anti-epidemic measures. Our goal is to formulate targeted measures instead of taking a “one size fits all” approach. Taking the experience over the past month as an example, we adopted stringent testing and quarantine measures decisively and promptly when cases with unknown sources were found in the community, while we immediately invoked the place-specific passenger flight suspension mechanism to mitigate the risk of the importation of the new mutant virus strains. As far as the people affected are concerned, the measures under the new direction in fighting the pandemic may be

more stringent than those in the past. Nevertheless, for the protection of the entire community, I appeal for their understanding and co-operation.

As with all other places around the world, the most feasible way for Hong Kong to get through the epidemic is for people to get vaccinated. Compared with the other places, Hong Kong has sufficient capacity in terms of vaccination. What is needed most now is the concerted efforts of members of the public. Continue to adopt a “wait and see” attitude will not give you and your family members the needed protection, or the conditions for Hong Kong to return to normality.

Protect yourself and others, get vaccinated!

Mrs Carrie Lam  
Chief Executive  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
26 April 2021