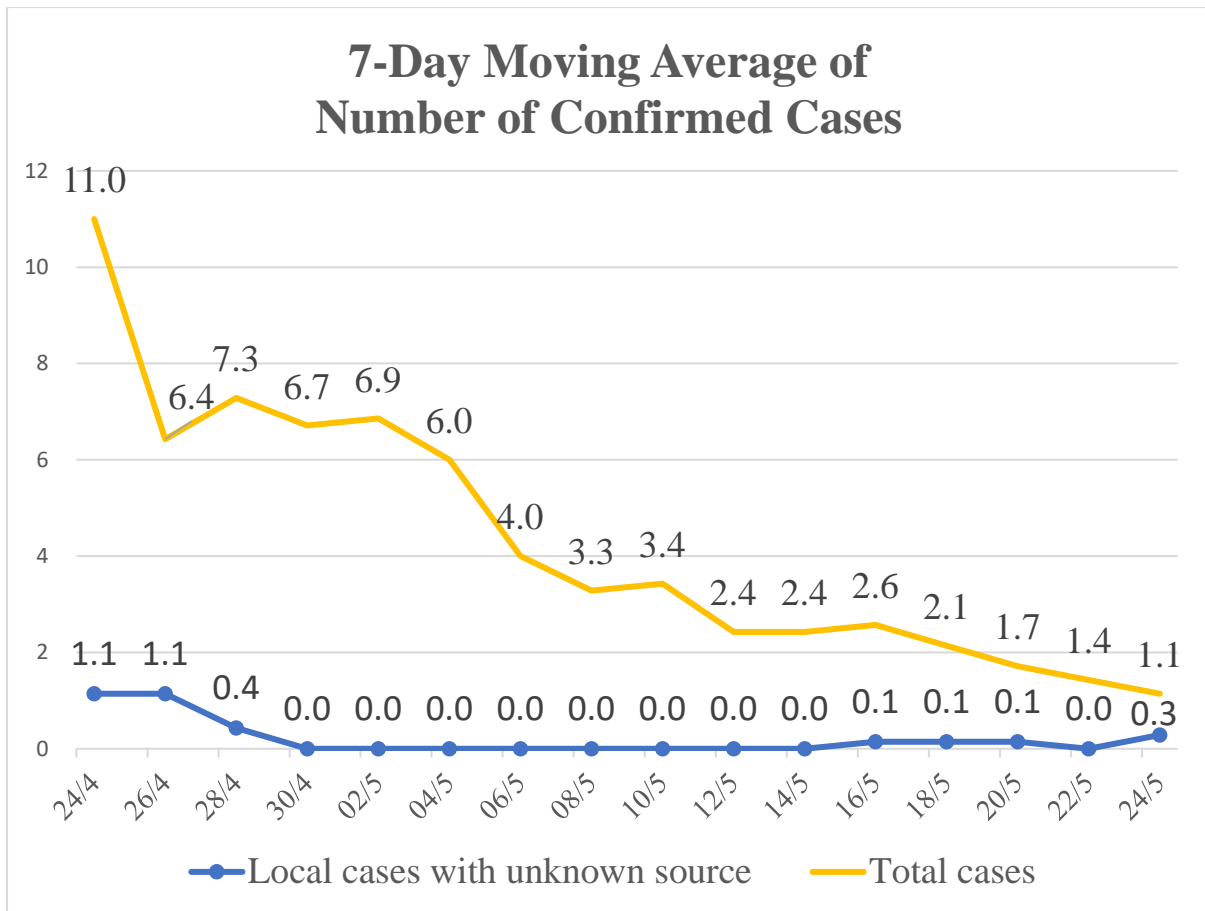


Say “No” to Vaccine Hesitancy

The epidemic situation has remained stable in the past month, with no local cases with unknown sources of infection for many days. After more than a year of hard fight against the virus by the whole community, there is hope of achieving “zero infection” in Hong Kong. While it is encouraging to see the epidemic under control, the Government will not be complacent. The recent rebound of cases in a number of neighbouring places is a timely reminder to us that we must not let down our guard and must continue to keep up our efforts, with vaccination being the most important measure.

The latest epidemic situation

In the month from April 25 to May 24, there were only three local cases with unknown sources, and the circumstances of the cases were quite special with the patients having a low viral load or already carrying antibodies. It is possible that the patients had been infected much earlier or viral interference had occurred, and it is believed that transmissibility was not high and the risks posed to the community was low. Nevertheless, decisive and stringent actions were taken to cordon off relevant areas to conduct compulsory testing and put the relevant residents in quarantine according to the new direction in fighting the pandemic announced last month, with a view to cutting off any possible chains of transmission.



Anti-epidemic efforts

As the local epidemic situation has stabilised with only sporadic confirmed cases, the need to step up efforts to guard against the importation of cases is all the more necessary. In the past month, the Government has at different times extended or tightened the entry restrictions and quarantine requirements for incoming travellers from places including India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Nepal, Taiwan, Argentina, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Singapore. On the prevention of the spreading of the virus in the community, in addition to the comprehensive and thorough investigation of each local confirmed case including conducting gene sequencing tests, we have continued to step up virus testing. In this connection, we have conducted over 120 000 virus tests per day on average in the past month, which is record breaking. Among them, since a number of cases involving foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) have been found, we have twice required all the about 370 000 FDHs

in Hong Kong to undergo compulsory testing, resulting in the identification of several cases that required follow-up actions. I would like to express my gratitude to FDHs, their employers and the relevant consulates for their support and co-operation and my appreciation to laboratory personnel for their hard work.

Regarding the food quality issue and unsatisfactory admission and discharge arrangements of quarantine centres during the above period, I hope that the public will understand the challenges faced by my colleagues in having to arrange for a large number of people to undergo quarantine within an extremely short period of time. The Government has already reflected on the experience and made steps for improvements.

The major measures introduced are set out below chronologically:

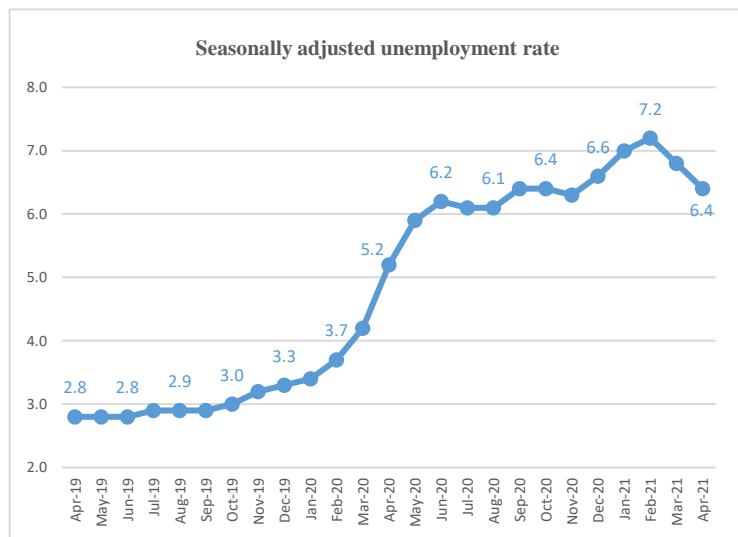
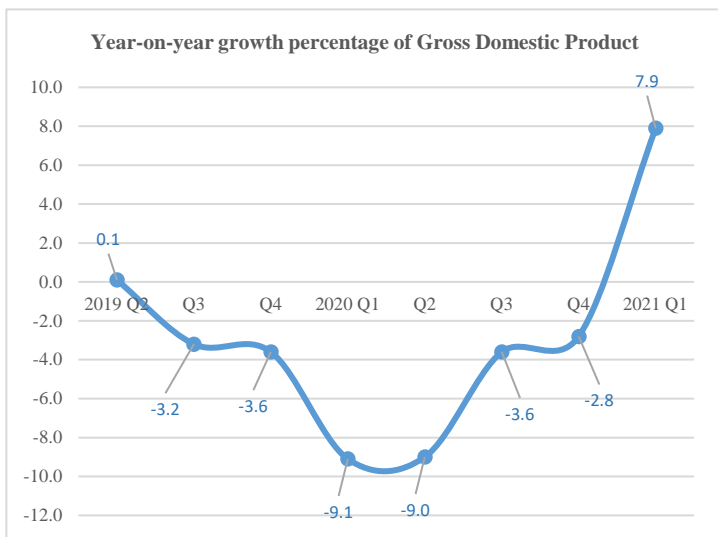
Date	Event
April 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Return2hk Travel Scheme for Hong Kong residents was extended from Guangdong Province and Macao to other Mainland provinces and municipalities. ➤ The Government relaxed certain social distancing measures with “vaccine bubble” as the basis. Catering businesses could extend their dine-in service hours and seat more persons at one table. Bars and nightclubs etc. could resume business with conditions. ➤ The Government extended the measure to prohibit all passenger flights from India, Pakistan and the Philippines from landing in Hong Kong. All passenger flights from Nepal would also be prohibited from landing in Hong Kong starting from May 1.
April 30	As two cases involving the N501Y mutant strain were FDHs, the Government required all FDHs in Hong Kong to undergo compulsory testing by May 9.

May 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Government updated the quarantine arrangements for local confirmed cases involving mutant strains. Residents living in the same building but not in the same unit with such cases would not be placed under quarantine for 21 days, but would be required to undergo more frequent testing. ➤ The Government announced the shortening of quarantine period for fully vaccinated close contacts of confirmed cases and fully vaccinated persons arriving at Hong Kong.
May 12	<p>All FDHs in Hong Kong were required to undergo compulsory testing for the second time from May 15 to May 30. Fully vaccinated FDHs were exempted from the requirement.</p>
May 16	<p>In view of the epidemic situation in Taiwan, the Government tightened the testing and quarantine arrangements for arrivals who have stayed in Taiwan. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed in Taiwan would be denied entry.</p>
May 17	<p>In view of the epidemic situation in Singapore, the governments of Hong Kong and Singapore decided to defer the target date of the inaugural flights under the bilateral Air Travel Bubble scheduled for May 26.</p>
May 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Government launched the outreach vaccination service for eligible enterprises to provide a more convenient way for their employees to get vaccinated. ➤ The Government further required persons arriving from Taiwan earlier who were still undergoing home quarantine to complete their remaining compulsory quarantine period at the quarantine hotels designated by the Department of Health.

May 21	➤ Argentina, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Singapore were classified as specified high-risk places. The boarding and quarantine arrangements for persons who have stayed in these places were tightened. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed in these places would be denied entry.
May 24	➤ All kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong fully resumed face-to-face classes on a half-day basis.
May 25	➤ The Government adjusted the Return2hk Travel Scheme, which would adopt the list of risk level for Mainland places published by the National Health Commission. Hong Kong residents who have visited any area in the Mainland being classified as a medium or high-risk area on the list in the past 14 days prior to and upon the day of arrival in Hong Kong would not be exempted from compulsory quarantine under the Return2hk Travel Scheme upon their entry into Hong Kong.

Hope is on the horizon with the economy rebounding

With the epidemic situation remaining stable and social distancing measures relaxed, there are more people on the street and many people go to shopping malls, the countryside, the beach and so on at the weekend. In addition, by putting various anti-epidemic measures in place, we have successfully held a number of large-scale events in our city, including the UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup, Art Basel Hong Kong, the French May Art Festival and more. The economic indicators released last month are also encouraging.



However, whether our economy will continue to improve in the time to come depends crucially on the resumption of travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, as well as between Hong Kong and overseas. For this to happen, it is essential for us to strive towards “zero infection” and achieve widespread vaccination.

Say “no” to vaccine hesitancy

Experts have repeatedly told us that vaccination represents the best hope, or perhaps even the only hope, for Hong Kong and the world to get out of the pandemic. As a matter of fact, in some parts of the world where the vaccination rate is high, the epidemic situation has improved significantly and people’s lives are returning to normal gradually. Hesitating about vaccination, taking a wait-and-see attitude, or thinking that vaccination is not necessary as the epidemic situation is stable, is acting against the aspirations of the whole community.

For yourself and others, please do not hesitate anymore and get vaccinated as soon as possible!

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