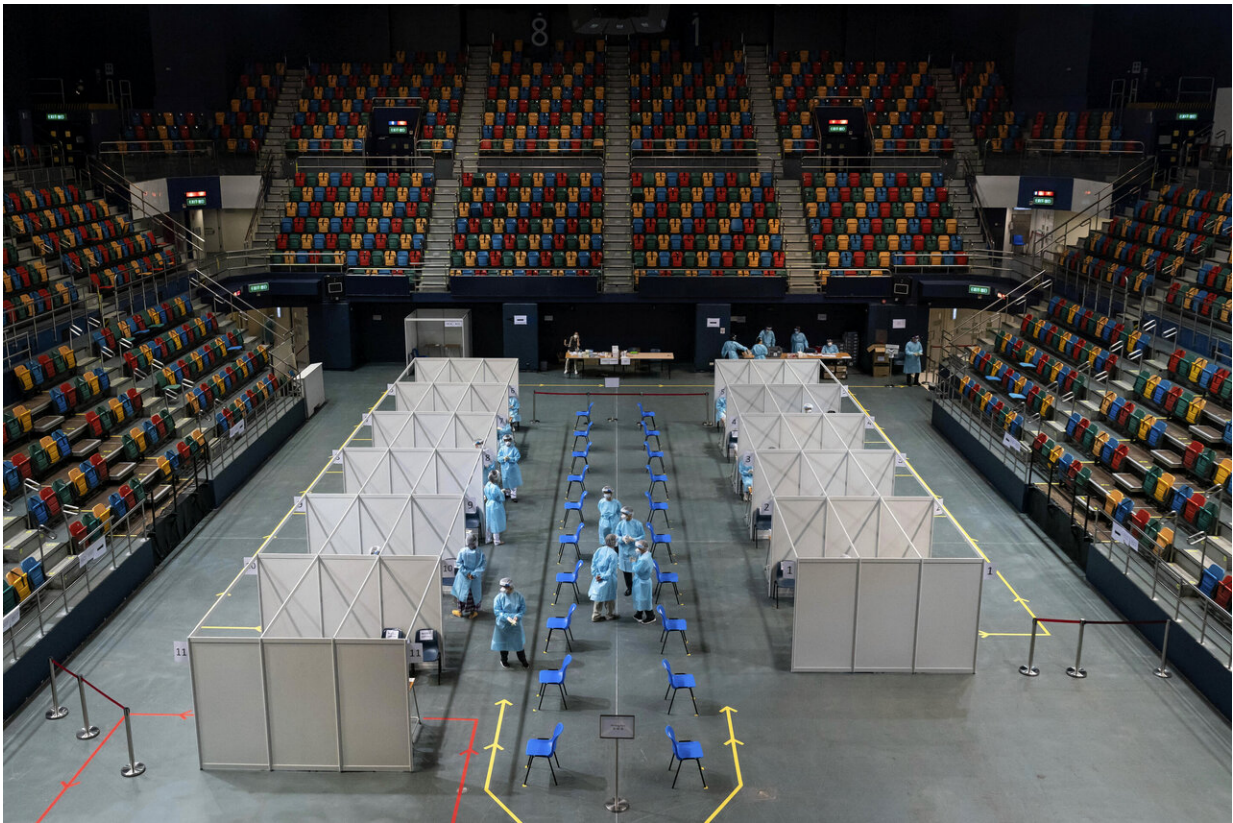


# Hong Kong begins mass testing for virus amid public doubts

September 1 2020, by Zen Soo

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The makeshift testing site is seen at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong began a voluntary mass-testing program for coronavirus Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. (Anthony Kwan /Pool Photo via AP)

Hong Kong tested more than 120,000 people for the coronavirus

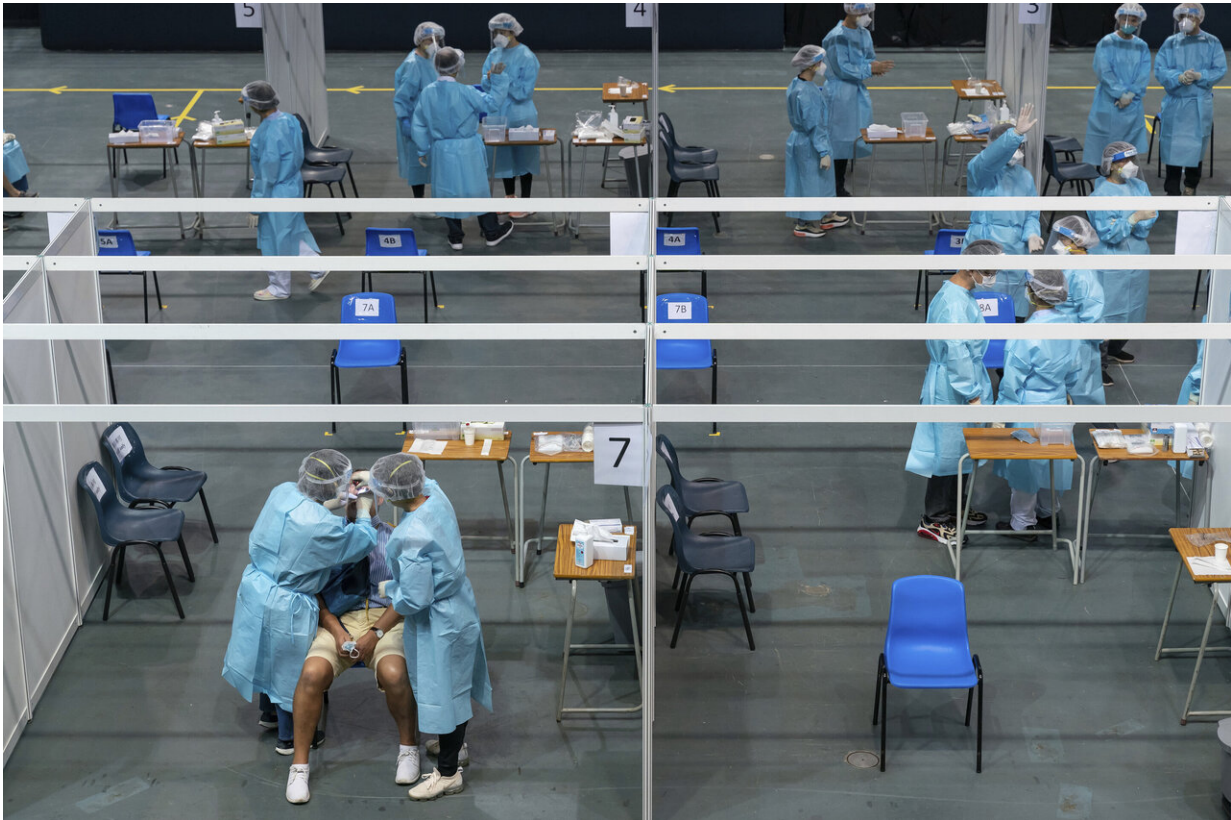
Tuesday at the start of a mass-testing effort that's become another political flash point in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Volunteers stood in lines at some of the more than 100 testing centers, though many residents are distrustful of the resources and staff being provided by China's central government and some have expressed fear DNA could be collected.

The Hong Kong government has dismissed such concerns, and leader Carrie Lam urged the public to see the program in a fair and objective light and appealed to critics to stop discouraging people from being tested since participation is crucial to the program's success.

Priscilla Pun, a sales manager, got tested to give herself peace of mind. "I don't see any reason not to do it, and this way I can let my family in Canada know that I am safe," said Pun, who was tested at a center in the eastern Quarry Bay neighborhood.

Others, like Giselle Ming, said she decided to take part to support the Hong Kong government's initiative even though she was not worried that she might be a carrier of the coronavirus. "In this bad situation of the coronavirus, I hope I can do something to help the society," she said.



Medical professionals collect samples from a man at a makeshift Covid-19 testing site at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong began a voluntary mass-testing program for coronavirus Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. (Anthony Kwan /Pool Photo via AP)

"This large-scale universal community testing program is beneficial to fighting the epidemic and beneficial to our society. It will also help Hong Kong come out of the pandemic unscathed and is conducive to the resumption of daily activities," Lam said at her weekly news conference.

More than 650,000 people in the city of 7.5 million signed up in advance for the program, which will last at least a week. It is aimed at identifying silent carriers of the virus—those without symptoms—who could be



spreading the disease.

On Tuesday, 126,000 people were tested, according to government officials. Only 10% of people who registered for tests did not turn up.

The government expects 5 million people will take part in the program, which could be extended to two weeks depending on demand.

Hong Kong's worst outbreak in early July was blamed in part on an exemption from quarantine requirements for airline staff, truck drivers from mainland China and sailors on cargo ships.



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam adjusts the face mask during a press conference on the state of the coronavirus in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong kicked off a voluntary mass-testing program for coronavirus

Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

At its peak, Hong Kong recorded more than 100 locally transmitted cases a day, after going weeks without any in June.

The outbreak has slowed, with the city reporting just nine cases on Monday, the first time in two weeks that daily infections had fallen to single digits. However, the government and some experts say that community testing can help detect asymptomatic carriers to further stop the spread of the virus.

Respiratory medicine expert professor David Hui said that even though infections have dwindled, the proportion of cases with untraceable sources of infection remain between 30% and 40%.

"That means there must be some silent transmission going on, so community testing has some role in picking up these silent transmitters," said Hui, a public health adviser to the city's government. "Hopefully if we can identify these people and isolate them for a period of time that may help to break the transmission chain in the community."



People wearing face masks queue for the coronavirus test outside a testing center in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong began a voluntary mass-testing program for coronavirus Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. The virus-testing program has become a flash point of political debate in Hong Kong, with many distrustful over resources and staff being provided by the China's central government and fears that the residents' DNA could be collected during the exercise (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

The program is more effective if most of the population takes part, Hui said.

"If only 1 or 2 million people take part, then we may not be able to achieve that objective," he said.



Other experts, such as Dr. Leung Chi-chiu, a respiratory specialist and a member of the Medical Council of Hong Kong, said the testing program plays only a supplementary role in controlling the pandemic in the city, due to the long and variable incubation period of the coronavirus.

Leung said mass testing may not be the most cost-effective method, as it is not easy to pick up the disease in its early development, especially if a person is not having symptoms or has not had recent exposure to an infected patient.

Even if mass testing could identify infected patients, they may already be past the infectious stage, he said.



People wearing face masks queue for the coronavirus test outside a testing center in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong began a voluntary mass-

testing program for coronavirus Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. The virus-testing program has become a flash point of political debate in Hong Kong, with many distrustful over resources and staff being provided by the China's central government and fears that the residents' DNA could be collected during the exercise.(AP Photo/Kin Cheung)



Nasal swab sample is collected from a man by a medical worker at a makeshift testing site in the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020. Hong Kong began a voluntary mass-testing program for coronavirus Tuesday as part of a strategy to break the chain of transmission in the city's third outbreak of the disease. (Anthony Kwan /Pool Photo via AP)



Leung said large-scale testing cannot replace traditional methods of social distancing and contact tracing, and should only be used as a complementary measure.

Some pro-democracy activists, such as Joshua Wong, have publicly opposed the program. Wong called for a boycott, citing Swedish media reports that some test kits being used had high rates of false-positive results.

Lam said that while false-positives can happen, the tests used in the program have passed quality assurance procedures.

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