

Hong Kong to tighten COVID-19 rules, seeks to open to China

October 26 2021, by Zen Soo



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam wearing an arm brace after suffering fracture from fall at home, attends a press conference in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2021. Lam said that under the city's Basic Law, the freedoms of association, assembly and speech are "guaranteed." "No organization should be worried about legitimate operations in Hong Kong," said Lam during a regular news conference Tuesday. "But it has to be done in accordance with the law." Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

Hong Kong will tighten COVID-19 restrictions despite a lack of local outbreaks to better align with China's policies and increase chances of quarantine-free travel between the territory and mainland, leader Carrie Lam said Tuesday.

It will step up contact tracing, such as requiring the use of its LeaveHomeSafe app in government premises to record the coming and going of visitors. It will also tighten quarantine rules to exempt only emergency workers or those in essential industries such as logistics. Currently, those exempt from quarantine include airline crew, banking and insurance executives, directors of public companies, as well as [crew members](#) on cargo and passenger ships, among others.

Hong Kong has not had a major local outbreak since the beginning of the year, with virtually no local transmission in recent months. But it is largely closed to international travel, and travelers from countries deemed high-risk such as the U.S. must serve a 21-day quarantine.

Authorities say resuming quarantine-free travel with the mainland is the top priority, compared to reopening travel internationally.

Lam said tightening restrictions to be "more in line with mainland practices" is necessary to give Chinese authorities confidence to resume quarantine-free cross-boundary travel.

"If Hong Kong were to loosen the [border controls](#) for people arriving from overseas or adopt what other countries have done ... to live with the COVID-19 virus, then the chances of resuming [travel](#) with the mainland will be reduced," she said at a weekly news conference where she wore a brace after recently breaking her arm.

She dismissed concerns that Hong Kong's restrictions will make it less attractive as an international business hub. "Hong Kong's primary

advantage lies in being the gateway to the mainland of China," she said.

The mainland government has maintained a zero-tolerance policy toward the pandemic, using lockdowns, quarantines and compulsory testing to stamp out COVID-19 outbreaks quickly.

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