

# Virus surge begins to overwhelm Hong Kong's COVID measures

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A worker wearing face mask, holds a government's contact tracing QR code for the "LeaveHomeSafe" COVID-19 mobile app at an entrance of local market, in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

Hong Kong's leader on Tuesday said a surge in coronavirus cases is

overwhelming the city's emergency resources, but defended the strict measures that have been imposed.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the Chinese central government was extending help to the city, which remains a nominally autonomous enclave.

Despite its varying success, Hong Kong has stuck with China's zero-tolerance strategy requiring lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing for COVID-19.

"So far, our measures to contain the spread of the disease remain legitimate and valid," Lam told reporters.

"The problem we are facing is given the magnitude, the pace of and the severity of this fifth wave," she said, "It has outgrown our capacity."

City health officials later reported a daily tally of 1,619 new cases, on top of a record 2,071 the previous day.

The Hospital Authority announced that it will dedicate seven clinics to seeing COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms. Other medical services at the clinics, including COVID-19 vaccinations, will be suspended.

The authority said the clinics and a new telephone hotline were "to cope with the rapid and huge increase in the number of confirmed patients, which has overwhelmed the capacity of isolation facilities of public hospitals and the community treatment and isolation facilities."



Children wearing face masks, line up to receive China's Sinovac COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at a community vaccination center in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022. Hong Kong approved to offer COVID-19 vaccines to children as young as 3 as infections rage through the semi-autonomous Chinese city. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung



Residents line up to get tested for the coronavirus at a temporary testing center for COVID-19, in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022. Hong Kong's leader on Tuesday said a surge of coronavirus cases is overwhelming the city's emergency resources, but defended strict measures that have been imposed. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung



A man walks past the Heng King House, new public housing units in the Lai King Estate that have yet to be occupied, is designated as quarantine stations in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022. Hong Kong's leader on Tuesday said a surge of coronavirus cases is overwhelming the city's emergency resources, but defended strict measures that have been imposed. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung



A woman wearing face mask walks past a Covid-19 precaution sign along a street in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022. Hong Kong residents expressed growing frustration this week after new, tighter coronavirus restrictions went into effect, imposed by city leaders in line with Beijing's zero-COVID policy. Credit: AP Photo/Vincent Yu

Lam added that authorities will designate as quarantine stations new public housing units that have yet to be occupied, along with about 10,000 hotel rooms. Hong Kong requires confirmed coronavirus cases to isolate.

The city's restrictions extend to limiting in-person gatherings to no more than two households, allowing only vaccinated people in shopping malls

and supermarkets, and closing places of worship, hair salons and other businesses.

Authorities have imposed lockdowns on residential buildings wherever clusters of infections are identified, and have banned public dining after 6 p.m. Schools have extended a suspension of in-class teaching until March 6.

A rush of worried parents brought young children to vaccination centers on Tuesday, public broadcaster RTHK said. It was [the first day a vaccine was available to children as young as 3](#) years old. The previous lower age limit was 5.

Lam said China's central government is working to "enhance the capacities at various parts of this anti-epidemic effort," but ruled out placing Hong Kong under a complete lockdown as has been done in various Chinese cities, where millions of residents have been confined to their homes in recent months.

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