

Achievements in combating the pandemic with decisive preventive and control measures



In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge to the Macao SAR, which had just celebrated the 21st anniversary of its establishment. Facing the major challenge of the pandemic, the Government has taken timely and decisive measures with the care, guidance and strong support of the Central People's Government, to combat the pandemic hand in hand with all sectors in Macao.

In the early stages of the pandemic, the Government implemented many measures to protect the lives of Macao residents. Upon the normalisation of anti-pandemic measures, we strived to consolidate our achievements in pandemic prevention by upholding the principle of preventing imported cases and averting the re-emergence of domestic cases, while making our best efforts in planning and reviewing pandemic control measures and procedures.

As of 31 December 2020, there had been 46 confirmed cases. All patients were successfully treated by the Health Bureau, and had recovered and been discharged from hospital. We have achieved interim results in maintaining zero deaths, zero community and hospital transmissions, low rates of severe cases and high cure rates.

In early January, in response to the outbreak of pneumonia of unknown causes in Wuhan, the Government maintained close contact with the National Health Commission. Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng made daily phone calls to Zhong Nanshan, an academican of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and Director of the National Clinical Research Center for Respiratory Diseases, and the head of the high-level expert group of the National Health Commission, to learn about the latest situation.

On 22 January, the first confirmed imported case of COVID-19 was recorded in Macao. Based on the already introduced series of preventive measures, the Government began deploying anti-pandemic measures. Under the leadership of Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, the “Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre” was promptly established. With the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ao Ieong U, serving as vice-chairman of the centre, the Government coordinated collaboration between relevant departments to reduce the threat of infection through health screening of all inbound visitors, timely tracking and quarantine of high-risk individuals and close contacts, and proper treatment of confirmed patients.

The Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre held daily press conferences from 22 January to 23 May, to report on the latest situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest guidelines. After that press conferences were held as needed to provide updates on related developments.

The Government Information Bureau actively supported the implementation of anti-pandemic policies and measures through disseminating information and anti-pandemic publicity. From 21 January to 31 December, the bureau live-broadcast 186 press conferences at the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre, and disseminated 1,948 news updates, which livestreamed the aforementioned press briefings in text format, as well as produced and disseminated infographics. At different stages of anti-pandemic work, the bureau leveraged the power of new media to produce a series of anti-pandemic promotional videos and infographics for publicity aimed at influencing public opinion. A total of 661 infographics, 39 promotional videos on anti-pandemic policies, and 32 sets of photos related to anti-pandemic measures were produced and published.

To enable the public to access the latest news conveniently and instantly about COVID-19, the Government Information Bureau established a special webpage for disseminating news from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre. As of 31 December 2020, this webpage was followed by 52,389 users, and received 46,759 likes. Of the 4,807 posts published during 2020 on the webpage, 4,448 were infographics and caption stories, and 359 were video clips (including 186 live broadcasts). As of 31 December 2020, the “COVID-19 news channel” Telegram Group received 8,490 subscriptions, while the “COVID-19 information clarification channel” Telegram Group received 645 subscriptions.

With the subsequent emergence of other imported cases, the Government fine-tuned its anti-pandemic measures.

The second imported case in Macao was confirmed on 23 January (the 29th day of December in the lunar calendar). As the Chinese New Year holiday was approaching, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng immediately held a press conference to announce the Government’s decision to intensify its disease prevention measures and cancel all large-scale public events during the Chinese New Year period. At the same time, the Government also called on all community groups to cancel or postpone their cultural activities and spring banquets during the Chinese New Year period, in order to minimise the risk of infection among residents.

The Chief Executive also announced a guaranteed face mask supply scheme for Macao people, to ensure all residents would have priority in purchasing face masks. The Government ordered 20 million face masks, and the first batch of three million face masks arrived in Macao on the same

day. Approximately 173 million face masks had been sold by 31 December 2020.

Apart from ensuring supplies of face masks and sanitising products, the Government also maintained close contact with industries, to ensure adequate supplies of food and daily necessities, and strictly monitored the market situation, to prevent sudden price hikes.

On 30 January, the Government announced a postponement to commencement of classes in schools and other educational institutions across Macao after the Chinese New Year holiday. Online classes were encouraged, to avoid the risk of infection in schools, so that learning would not halt while classes were suspended.

All training courses, seminars and other activities – including civil servant trainings – were suspended or conducted online during the severe period of the pandemic. Training, cultural and recreational activities, and interest classes, organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the Sports Bureau, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Municipal Affairs Bureau were temporarily suspended. The sports, recreation, cultural and entertainment, and exhibition venues administered by the Government were closed. As the pandemic began alleviating, these venues gradually reopened on a limited basis, strictly following guidelines for controlling the number of users, to avoid crowds forming.

Macao-Zhuhai joint prevention and control to strengthen anti-pandemic measures at border checkpoints

The Gongbei checkpoint between Macao and Zhuhai is China's busiest port in terms of traveller movement, with over 170 million people entering and exiting through there in 2019. In order to strictly avoid the risk of community infection, officials from both sides set up a Macao-Zhuhai COVID-19 prevention and control working group, co-headed by Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak from Macao and Zhao Jianguo, Deputy Secretary of the Zhuhai Municipal Committee, from Zhuhai. The working group implemented a notification system to share the latest information on the pandemic, and provide testing, quarantine, and treatment services to residents on both sides, with the aim of jointly preventing and combating the pandemic.



In the early stage of the pandemic, the Public Security Police and the Health Bureau worked together to implement temperature screening at all border checkpoints, set up health declaration areas and special lanes for visitors from Hubei province, implemented crowd control measures at busy ports, and opened additional lanes to divert passenger flows as required, to reduce the risk of infection due to crowding. Also, electronic technology was introduced to strengthen pandemic prevention and control at the borders. The Government launched electronic health declarations and a health declaration system for the convenience of residents, and for facilitating tracking and detection of patients.

Targeting visitors from high-risk areas, the Macao Government Tourist Office collected information through the tourism industry, while the Public Security Police contacted visitors to closely follow up regarding their health conditions, and provided necessary guidance and assistance.

In response to confirmed COVID-19 infections of two Macao residents, the *Macao SAR Gazette* published Executive Order No. 27/2020 on 4 February: In order to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission, casinos and other entertainment facilities in Macao should be closed from 00:00 hours on 5 February. At a press conference, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng announced that operations of the gaming industry and related entertainment businesses would be suspended for half a month. He said that this was a difficult decision, but public health was the only consideration, and Macao could still afford the related economic losses.

The Government gradually stepped up its efforts to prevent the pandemic, by formulating and adjusting anti-pandemic measures such as requiring inbound visitors and residents from areas with a high incidence of COVID-19 cases to undergo medical examinations, and requiring non-local workers from mainland China to undergo 14-day quarantine and medical observation at a designated site in Zhuhai, to reduce the potential risk of infection and ensure that, if required, they receive timely medical treatment.

In the community, various government departments promoted pandemic prevention and conveyed health messages to the public through existing channels and networks, to raise public awareness of pandemic prevention. In order to prevent community infection, the Health Bureau and the Public Security Police closely tracked the movement of confirmed patients, looked for close contacts of confirmed patients, and investigated who might have been in contact with them. It took nearly two months for confirmed patients to undergo inpatient hospitalisation and rehabilitation quarantine before returning to the community, in order to effectively protect the health of patients and other residents.

The Fire Services Bureau was responsible for transporting patients suspected of being infected with COVID-19, and implemented a series of measures including deployment of designated service vehicles and personnel. Paramedics were strictly required to wear protective gear, and both personnel and vehicles were thoroughly cleaned and disinfected upon completion of the transportation tasks. Paramedics who transported patients who were confirmed to have COVID-19 were required to conduct personal health observation, to prevent the virus spreading. As of 31 December 2020, the Fire Services Bureau had provided transportation services for 2,406 suspected cases involving 3,157 people.

In the face of the first wave of the pandemic, the series of measures taken in Macao achieved

interim satisfactory results. After the tenth case, confirmed on 4 February, no new cases were confirmed in the next 39 consecutive days.

Achieved interim success in pandemic prevention and assisted residents who were stranded abroad to return to Macao



In March, the pandemic was basically under control in mainland China, and no new cases had been found in Macao for a relatively long time. On 7 March, the Government sent a chartered plane to Wuhan to pick up 57 Macao residents who were stranded in Hubei. They belonged to 31 families; the youngest of them was three months old and the oldest was 77 years old. After returning to Macao, they underwent 14 days of quarantine and medical surveillance at the public health clinical centre on Estrada do Alto de Coloane. After receiving three rounds of nucleic acid tests, all of them tested negative for COVID-19.

On 11 March, the World Health Organization characterised the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, indicating that this infectious disease had broken out in several countries and regions. On 13 March, the Higher Education Bureau stated that in view of the global spread of COVID-19, especially in Europe and other places, and considering that there were more than 3,000 Macao tertiary students studying in various places overseas, the Government urged Macao tertiary students studying abroad to return to Macao as soon as possible. At the same time, the Health Bureau developed guidelines for students to stay in foreign countries, and guidelines for taking flights. The Higher Education Bureau emailed these to all Macao tertiary students studying abroad and related student associations.

On 15 March, a flight attendant working in Macao was confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 after returning from Portugal, breaking the 39-day streak of no new confirmed cases in Macao. At the same time, considering that Hong Kong required people who had been to the Schengen Area in Europe (comprising 26 countries), including Macao residents, to undergo 14-day medical quarantine measures, the Government sent vehicles to pick up Macao residents and students from the Hong Kong International Airport, and bring them back to Macao. The pick-up services lasted from 17 to 22 March. After arriving in Macao, the returnees had to undergo medical observation.

On 18 March, the National Health Commission announced that there were no new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Hubei province, where Wuhan is located. This was the first announcement of “zero confirmed cases” in Wuhan since the outbreak, but at the same time, the numbers of confirmed cases in Asia, Europe and America gradually increased. In response to the worldwide pandemic, the Government announced on 18 March that all non-local residents were prohibited from entering Macao, except for residents of mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and employees with Macao non-resident ID cards, in order to continue blocking the sources of infection and avoid the risk of imported virus. On 25 March, the entry ban was extended to all residents of mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan who had visited a foreign country within 14 days prior to entry. Other persons coming from Taiwan and Hong Kong, including Macao residents, were subject to 14-day medical observation.

According to the new immigration measures, the scope of eligibility to register for the Government’s service to pick up Macao students and outbound travellers from Hong Kong International Airport was expanded to encompass all countries, rather than just Europe and the United States. The pick-up period was extended, to last until 31 March rather than 22 March. From 17–31 March, more than 2,100 Macao residents returned to Macao via these measures. Between 17 June and 16 July, the Government deployed special ferry services to bring more than 1,700 people from Hong Kong International Airport back to Macao, and more than 1,100 people travelled through Macao’s Pac On Ferry Terminal to Hong Kong International Airport for taking flights.

In order to prevent cases being imported from overseas, Zhuhai implemented further preventive measures by conducting nucleic acid tests of all persons entering through the borders, and keeping them under quarantine and medical observation for 14 days. Through coordination arranged by the collaborative working group, Macao residents holding Zhuhai residence permits, drivers of vehicles with both Macao and mainland China licence plates, and drivers of vehicles that only have Macao licence plates making them eligible to enter and leave Hengqin are exempted from quarantine if their nucleic acid test upon entering Zhuhai is negative.

In early May, the Health Bureau launched the Macao Health Code, to achieve “closed-loop management” from entry at the border to the community. Subsequently, the Macao Health Code and the Yuekang Code were mutually recognised. At the same time, a routine nucleic acid testing programme was launched, and the testing capacity was gradually increased through cooperation with third-party organisations, and aligned with the immigration and quarantine policies of mainland China and neighbouring regions, to ensure safe entry and exit through the borders, and to prepare for customs clearance. As of 31 December 2020, there were about 130 million applications for the Macao Health Code, and about 2.16 million nucleic acid tests had been performed.

The pandemic in mainland China gradually eases, allowing timely adjustments of border-crossing measures



In May, as the pandemic in mainland China began to ease, traffic and border crossing measures between Macao, mainland China, and Hong Kong gradually resumed, at a limited scale. On 15 July, people entering Guangdong province through the Guangdong-Macao border were no longer required to undergo quarantine for 14 days. After receiving a negative nucleic acid test and applying for the “Health Code” and “Yuekang Code”, people entering Guangdong via Macao could also travel within nine cities: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, and Zhaoqing. Starting from 12 August, Macao residents were exempted from medical observation and quarantine for entering mainland China provinces beyond Guangdong province.

On the day of this new measure was introduced, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng led a delegation of the MSAR Government to Beijing, to meet and exchange views with more than 10 national ministries on promotion of Macao’s economic development, especially the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, and the pandemic prevention measures.

For mainland China residents coming to Macao, the immigration control departments of Zhuhai, Guangdong and the national public security authorities resumed accepting travel permit applications for visiting Macao on 12 August, 26 August, and 23 September, respectively.

On 17 July, the patient of the 46th case in Macao had recovered and was discharged from hospital, officially marking “zero infections” of COVID-19 in Macao. Primary and secondary schools resumed normal classes in May and June. This also marked the gradual return to normal of Macao’s social and commercial activities and people’s daily lives.

Public departments upholding anti-pandemic measures and adjusting services to resume normal life



During the COVID-19 pandemic, depending on the nature of their work, various government departments have adopted special countermeasures to protect the health of residents and employees.

In response to the preventive and control measures implemented by the Government during the anti-pandemic period, the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau issued 21 guidelines to public departments on pandemic prevention measures. The contents included exemption from work arrangements, maintaining emergency or essential services, and important notes on resumption of normal business. To align with the work of the Health Bureau, recommendations and guidelines issued by the bureau on prevention of COVID-19 were distributed to all public departments.

After gradually resuming public services, all departments have been strictly following guidelines and strictly enforce the cleaning and disinfection of workspaces, especially in residents' reception areas, and required staff to take their body temperatures and make health declarations at work.

In terms of services, the Government has been effectively implementing crowd control and encouraged residents to use self-services, along with online registration and appointments, to greatly reduce waiting times and numbers of people gathering. Also, all employees and residents are required to wear face masks when entering the premises of Government agencies and departments.

In terms of public transportation, the Transport Bureau required the bus, taxi, LRT and related management companies to maintain close communications, enhance the cleaning and disinfection of public transport and stations, pay attention to the health condition of employees, and enhance the protection of bus drivers. Also, wearing face masks is mandatory on public transportation, and passengers are urged to pay attention to personal hygiene.