

Actively Responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Gradually Returning to Normal Life



As the Covid-19 pandemic entered its third year, we were also faced with the emergence of new variants of the virus. The SAR Government has been adhering to the principle of putting the health and safety of citizens first, keeping in line with the country's overall prevention and control strategy and guidelines, and striving to cope with the pandemic, while adjusting measures according to the changing pandemic situation, gradually restoring normal functioning of society.

Dedicated community testing for infections and striving to maintain normal functioning of society

In 2022, the Government persisted with the general strategy of “preventing imported cases and a rebound of the pandemic in Macao” and the general principle of “dynamic zero-infection”, continuously strengthening its preventive measures in response to changes in the pandemic situation. On 18 June, the Health Bureau was notified that a test of ten samples mixed together yielded a positive result for Covid-19. After re-examination, it was confirmed that one of the subjects again tested positive.

This was the first positive case in Macao since the outbreak in the autumn of 2021. Subsequently, more local infections were detected through nucleic acid testing in key population groups, key regions and citywide. Omicron BA.5.1, the variant of the virus that caused the outbreak, is highly contagious, spreads quickly and has a short incubation period. The Government immediately

launched the response mechanism and activated region-specific, multi-level prevention and control in accordance with the contingency plan. Under the command of the Chief Executive, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre (the Coordination Centre) and the Civil Protection Action Centre worked together to implement various measures to stop an explosive surge in the pandemic.

On 18 June, the Coordination Centre announced that all Macao citizens and people staying in Macao must participate in citywide nucleic acid testing from 12 noon on 19 June to 12 noon on 21 June. At the same time, nucleic acid testing of key population groups (security, cleaning and property management workers) and key areas was carried out, rapid antigen testing was introduced, KN95 masks were distributed, and measures were implemented to reduce the movement and gathering of people, to prevent community transmission of the virus.

Subsequently, two more citywide nucleic acid tests were conducted, until 3 July, and the number of new cases per day decreased from 96 on 26 June to 68 on 3 July. Hence, an explosive surge in the pandemic was successfully prevented.

With the care from the Central Government, the coordination of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office and the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, as well as the support of Guangdong Province Government and Zhuhai Municipality Government, 650 swab takers were sent to Macao to assist in nucleic acid testing. After reviewing and optimising the nucleic acid testing process, the Government conducted one round of citywide nucleic acid testing for key population groups every two days from 4 July to 10 July. The number of mixed samples testing positive continued dropping, from 94 in the fourth round to 23 in the sixth round. The number of new cases per day reached 146 on 5 July, then gradually decreased to 59 on 10 July.

Implementing relatively static management to effectively block community infection

On 10 July, in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Prevention of Infectious Diseases, the Chief Executive, Mr Ho Iat Seng, issued an executive order stating that all non-essential industrial and commercial companies and premises, except those required for public services and people's daily necessities, would suspend operations for a week, from midnight on 11 July, with Macao thus entering a "static management" period. The suspension was later extended to 22 July. During this period, rapid antigen testing, citywide nucleic acid testing once every two days and nucleic acid testing of key population groups once a day, as well as nucleic acid testing in key regions, continued being conducted in order to break the chain of community transmission of the virus.

During the period of "static management", with the concerted efforts of the authorities, community groups and residents, the daily number of new cases dropped significantly, and cases in the community first returned to zero on 21 July. With just one community case on 22 July, the Response and Coordination Centre announced a trial "consolidation period" from 23 July, to gradually resume essential social operations. Moreover, based on the different risk levels of various population groups, it set different frequencies for nucleic acid testing, to identify potential sources of infection in the community as quickly as possible.

After the 14th round of city-wide nucleic acid testing yielded all negative results, Macao entered a six-day “stabilisation period” from midnight on 2 August. Rapid antigen testing was no longer required prior to nucleic acid testing. Nucleic acid testing was carried out once a day for key population groups, and once every three days for people working away from home. Subsequently, Macao resumed normalisation of epidemic prevention, returning to the same situation as prior to the outbreak on 18 June.



During the “618” outbreak, more than 11.8 million test samples were taken in 14 rounds of citywide nucleic acid testing and multiple rounds of nucleic acid testing in key regions and population groups. The Government continued improving the related arrangements, including by increasing the number of testing stations from 53 to 75, increasing the number of sampling booths, adding mobile sampling vehicles and opening more outdoor testing stations, and opening special care stations earlier in the day, to increase convenience for citizens. The time to complete each round of nucleic acid sampling was shortened from 48 hours to 28 hours. Also, there were more than 21.8 million self-reported results of rapid antigen testing. During the period, 88 red code areas and 301 yellow code areas were set up, and staff and volunteers were mobilised to meet the basic living needs of residents in these.

During the pandemic, the regional joint prevention and control mechanism once again played an important role. The Government maintained close contacts with Guangdong and Zhuhai, continuously exchanged pandemic information, discussed pandemic prevention and control arrangements, and coordinated customs clearance arrangements for imported fresh foods, anti-pandemic supplies and essential personnel.

Returning to normal life in accordance with the country's prevention and control policy

On 8 December, the Government announced that the prevention and control of the pandemic in Macao entered a “transitional period”, in accordance with the country's policy of optimising epidemic prevention and control. The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ms Ao Ieong U, pointed out that many challenges had arisen since the outbreak of the pandemic three years ago, and the Government had made every effort to protect the general public. Thanks to the joint efforts of all Macao residents, the number of Covid-19 cases in Macao was relatively low, and there had been six deaths. As the Omicron virus strain that spread all over the world became more and more contagious, it became easier to recover from the disease after infection, and as Macao's vaccination rate stood at over 90 percent, the conditions were ready for Macao to adjust the pandemic prevention measures.

Ms Ao Ieong U pointed out that although more than 50 percent of those infected with the Omicron strain were asymptomatic, there was still a significant number of people suffering mild symptoms and the virus was highly transmissible. A relatively large number of people were expected to be infected in the short term, and there would be some cases of severe or critical illness or even death. To avoid increasing the medical burden, Macao residents were urged to take the first line of responsibility for their own health and to protect themselves and those around them, while the elderly should be vaccinated as soon as possible to obtain early protection so they could open a fresh chapter in their lives.

Ms Ao Ieong U also revealed that the Government had been actively preparing for two months to formulate a transitional response plan for the prevention and control of the pandemic, to prepare for the implementation of various measures after making appropriate adjustments subsequent to the country's announcement of new policies. According to the plan, all departments had implemented the management of essential supplies, system configuration, set-up of venues, personnel training and other work.

On 9 December, the Macao SAR cancelled nucleic acid testing on arrival, as well as nucleic acid testing and rapid antigen testing for incoming visitors. On 10 December, the Response and Coordination Centre updated the pandemic control guidelines. Venues not belonging to four key types could decide whether the presentation of a health code would be necessary for entry. Infected persons were allowed to be quarantined at home, with their health codes changed to red. Also, only “residential units” with infected cases would be classified as red code areas. A whole building would be classified as a yellow code area only when more than 10% of its residential units presented infected cases over five consecutive days, and the colour code would be lifted after no new infected case was found for five consecutive days.

A series of measures also included: phased distribution of anti-pandemic kits to all Macao residents, free medication and pandemic prevention materials for people of different ages, and the release of medication guidelines and videos; introduction of home isolation guidelines for close contacts; opening of community clinics for infected persons; and gradually reducing the requirement for nucleic acid testing and transitioning to simple rapid antigen testing.

The testing requirements for people entering Macao from mainland China were to be gradually

relaxed, and the entry control measures for people from outside mainland China, including those from foreign countries, Hong Kong and Taiwan, were to be adjusted according to the latest national policy.

After entering the transitional period of pandemic prevention and control, Macao saw a large number of Covid-19 infections. The SAR government implemented a tiered management system for infected persons, as planned. Through the Platform for Self-assessment and Community Outpatient Appointment for Covid-19 Patients, patients were triaged in order to determine if their cases were suitable for home isolation, community outpatient clinics via booking, community treatment centres, or special emergency care at Conde S. Januário Hospital by ambulance transfer. The Government also set up a western medicine telephone consultation service, to provide appropriate treatment for infected patients with various levels of medical needs. A total of 60 “Support Hotlines for Infected Persons” were set up, to respond to enquiries from infected persons or their families regarding various measures. The hotline was put into operation at 9am on 14 December. By midnight on 31 December, it had received 37,843 calls.

Authorities and residents have cooperated to fight the pandemic for three years to achieve better prevention and control

During the past three years of Covid-19 prevention and control, the Health Bureau has achieved good results in the prevention and control work, and continued making every effort to promote Covid-19 vaccination. By 31 December, 2022, a total of 1.79 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine had been administered, about 677,000 people had been vaccinated, 38,000 of whom had received only the first dose, 246,000 had received the second dose, 314,000 had received the third dose and 78,000 had received the fourth dose.

As for the treatment of infected people, a variety of drugs for the treatment of Covid-19 have been introduced and stockpiled; and the application of traditional Chinese medicine has been employed with reference to experience in mainland China, to improve the efficacy of treatment. From 1 January 2020 to 31 December, 2022, there were 2,501 confirmed cases, with 2,207 people discharged from hospital and 45 deaths.

In addition to vaccinations, and treating infected patients, the Health Bureau undertook a number of key prevention and control efforts, including:

- Maintaining the operation of isolation treatment facilities at the Public Health Clinical Centre and the Conde S. Januário Hospital, and providing additional temporary isolation treatment facilities such as hotels with treatment in isolation, rehabilitation centres and inpatient areas of community treatment centres, in accordance with the development of the pandemic, providing a total of about 6,400 beds;
- Launching a program to supply masks to Macao residents, to ensure the daily use of masks by everyone. As of 31 December 2022, about 240 million masks had been sold;
- Risk-based assessment of people entering from different regions. Introducing an electronic health reporting and health declaration system, implementing quarantine measures such as temperature screening and medical observation at borders, and adjusting entry policies according to the situation;

- The Health Code mobile application was launched in late November 2021, adding a “travel log” function to improve the efficiency of epidemiological surveys. By the end of 2022, about 1.057 million people had registered for the Health Code mobile app, and 480 million applications for the Macao Health Code through the app were processed;
- Carrying out nucleic acid testing and cooperating with third-party institutions to gradually improve testing capacity. By the end of 2022, a total of 35.64 million samples had been tested;
- In April 2022, the anti-pandemic Chinese medicine team was established. During the “618” pandemic, for the first time, a combination of Chinese and Western medicine was used to treat more than 1,350 infected persons (about 74% of all infected persons) who agreed to this treatment and more than 110 persons accompanying them; in total about 1,500 persons were provided with traditional Chinese medicines including Lianhua Qingwen capsules and Huoxiang Zhengqi soft capsules/oral liquid. Among 408 infected persons who were foreign nationals, 268 were treated with traditional Chinese medicine, representing 67 percent of this total.

A New Horizon for Macao-Hengqin Integration, with Comprehensive Developments in Full Swing



Over a year since its establishment, the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (Cooperation Zone) has got off to a good start with the support of the Central People’s Government. Operating within the new system of mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration, and shared benefits, Guangdong and Macao have joined hands to foster the construction of the Cooperation Zone with the “general theme” – focusing on industrial development, integration of people’s livelihoods, and alignment of rules and regulations, with significant milestones achieved