



UPDATED ADVICE FOR PATIENTS #9 – WEEK OF [MARCH 23](#), 2020

Many of you will now be familiar with the information in our updates and much of our early advice has now been repeated by governments and in mainstream news. We are continuing to publish in an updated format as we are seeing many new patients who will be receiving this for the first time and because we know many of you are forwarding the advice to friends and relatives in other countries. While a consensus is slowly developing on how best to manage Covid-19 and protect populations from it, there is still fake news and conflicting advice adding to everyone's anxiety. We hope to be able to continue to help you to make the best informed decisions you can in a way that also reduces anxiety. Please continue to send in your questions as they help us refine the content of our updates.

TELECONSULTS:

In response to the escalating international response to COVID-19, and anticipating further restrictions, we would like to reassure our patients that we will always be available for telephone or Skype consultations. These can be done for people under home quarantine or self-isolation for COVID-19 or non COVID-19 problems. Whilst we have had no cases of COVID-19 in any of our clinics many of our patients prefer not to risk travel and come in to the clinic. We continue to arrange for both the delivery of medications and home test kits.

TESTING:

If you are asymptomatic and need testing in order to be able to travel, this can be done in the clinic. If you are symptomatic, quarantined, self isolating or think you may be at risk and need testing, please call us for a telephone or Skype consultation and we can arrange to send you a test kit.

[PATIENTS WHO HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH A KNOWN OR SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19, HAVE TRAVELLED INTERNATIONALLY IN THE PAST 14](#)

DAYS, ARE A HOUSEHOLD CONTACT OF A TRAVELLER, OR WHO BECOME ILL WITHIN 14 DAYS OF SUCH TRAVEL:

- Stay at home, practice hand hygiene and wear a mask
- As far as practicable, stay away from other family members, particularly vulnerable family members.
- Email our clinic at enquiries@centralhealth.com.hk or call 2824 0822 to arrange a telephone or Skype consultation now, or (if it can wait) an appointment in two weeks' time.
- If you develop symptoms, email the clinic at urgentadvice@centralhealth.com.hk or follow the emergency out-of-hours advice on our website.
- You can also call the Department of Health Hotline at 2125 1122

Be aware that it has been made a criminal offence to provide false or misleading information about your travel history to a healthcare professional. Please be honest; we will do our best to help you.

ALL PATIENTS: HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

- Delay ALL non-essential travel. Travel spreads the disease and also increases your likelihood of being quarantined. Avoiding international travel is now officially advised by the Department of Health
- Do not travel, socialize or go to work while sick. Even if only a minor cold.
- Do not smoke (not even pot!). Do not Vape. These things damage your lungs and make you susceptible to severe infection.
- Avoid social gatherings – If unavoidable, keep social gatherings to less than 6 people and make sure all participants are healthy.
- Reduce non-essential travel on public transport particularly during peak travel hours
- Practice hand hygiene frequently (soap and water for 20 seconds when possible, otherwise alcohol sanitizer) and avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes. After washing your hands, use a paper towel to wrap the water tap and door knob, rather than touching them again.
- Practice hand hygiene after touching an animal, including your own pets.
- Cover your cough. The most effective way to prevent transmission of viruses when coughing or sneezing is to use a tissue. Cough or sneeze into your elbow if no tissue is available.

- Wear a mask (at a minimum) when crowds are unavoidable, when around sick people, or if feeling unwell yourself. Be sure to practice hand hygiene before putting on or after taking off a mask.

As it has become socially unacceptable to not wear a mask in Hong Kong, and some buildings may require it, you may need a mask at times simply to make other people comfortable, or conform with local measures.

- Avoid the following high-risk activities: travel on cruise ships; large communal food-sharing including buffets, banquets and hotpots; conferences and large networking events; religious gatherings
- In social situations avoid handshakes, hugs and kisses. Many people will not appreciate this form of greeting
- Carry your own pen instead of using publicly provided ones.
- Clean your phone, tablet, laptop and computer keyboard regularly.
- Open your windows to keep your home well-ventilated.
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and once a week pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-traps). Close the toilet lid before flushing. And of course, wash your hands!
- Get your flu vaccine if you have not already done so.
- Delay elective surgery and non-urgent appointments in government hospitals. This will allow the hospital authority to concentrate resources on the epidemic.
- For non-infectious semi-urgent medical issues, if you are able to attend a private hospital Accident & Emergency rather than a public hospital, this is preferable, for the same reasons.
- Consider using our teleconsult service for general practice and psychology/psychiatry consultations. While not always feasible, for many conditions it is perfectly possible to arrange remote consultations. This will reduce the number of people in the clinic at any one time.
- Give a copy of this advice to your helpers.

[TO SEE WHAT WE ARE DOING TO KEEP YOU SAFE, PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)

Novel Coronavirus Update for Patients #9– Week of **March 23, 2020**

Written by Dr Sarah Borwein

[Total Global Case numbers as of March 23, 2020](#)

Total Cases: >325,000 (>169,000 last week, >100,000 the week before that)

Total Deaths: >14,500 (>6500 last week)

Total Recovered: > 97,000 (> 77,000 last week)

- More than 70% of cases are now outside China
- Transmission aboard cruise ships: more than 800 cases aboard 7 ships
- Transmission occurring outside of China with community transmission: more than 182,000 cases in 95 countries
- Imported cases only with no local transmission: >2600 cases in 87 countries

There are now far more cases outside of China than inside it and China has more imported new cases than local ones.

It took 3 months to reach 100,000 cases, then 12 days to reach 200,000, and 5 days to reach 300,000. We are clearly on the upwards slope of the curve.

Several countries either cannot count all their cases, or have elected not to try. This includes the US, the UK, the Scandinavian countries and several others. Countries that once criticized China for incomplete case counting are now discovering just how difficult it is.

So once again, the case counts are becoming less instructive to watch and you certainly cannot judge a country's situation by looking at official numbers.

Hong Kong Situation:

Total cases: 317 (up from 155, last week and 114 the week before)

Imported cases: Of the new cases this week, most (but not all) are imported and at least 3 are close contacts of imported cases

Deaths: 4

Critical condition: 1

Discharged: 100

While Hong Kong's situation remains under control, there has been a dramatic surge in cases, largely associated with people returning from overseas. Most cases have been imported from the UK, followed by the rest of Europe, and North America. There has also been a significant local cluster associated with a wedding banquet at the Auberge Discovery Bay on [March 14th](#) and another from Lan Kwai

Fong and Pure Fitness Centers in Central.

Since Monday [March 16th](#), all arrivals from Western Europe have been subject to 14 days of mandatory self-quarantine. That was extended to ALL international arrivals as of Thursday [March 19th](#). But a great many people came back to Hong Kong before the quarantines kicked in, and we are seeing a significant number of new COVID-19 cases in this group.

For many weeks, our clinic has been offering testing to symptomatic people on home-collected saliva samples. We had not seen a single positive result until this week. But now we have seen many. We have strict triage and manage all of these cases remotely without bringing them into the clinic. Nonetheless it is clear that COVID-19 is affecting the demographic of our patient population.

[What does this mean?](#)

IT MEANS THE NEXT TWO WEEKS ARE CRUCIAL

If we are to avoid this wave of imported cases unleashing massive community transmission, we must take decisive action now. The Department of Health has stepped up testing, contact tracing and quarantine measures. Care of cases in hospitals is exemplary. But it is even more important that individuals in the community do their part.

FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS:

1. People who returned from travelling overseas (ANYWHERE except Macao or Taiwan), [please self-isolate for 14 days](#) even if you managed to get home before the mandatory quarantine and even if you have no symptoms. I cannot stress enough how important this is. If you develop symptoms during this time, please call us.
2. People who have household members who have returned from travel should either have the traveler stay elsewhere, or stay separately yourself. If this is not possible, try to isolate the traveler within the household. See our [Guidelines for Self-Isolation and Quarantine](#).
3. [Consider home-collected saliva testing for arriving travelers](#). It will NOT change the quarantine or self-isolation guidelines, but at least will make sure that any

cases already positive for COVID-19 are rapidly identified and the rest of your family protected. If the test is negative, you should STILL continue self-isolation. In other words, the test is mainly valuable if POSITIVE. A negative test is not a guarantee. While some people test positive in the pre-symptomatic phase, many people have tested negative then and positive later, after symptoms develop.

Please call us to arrange testing.

4. **Please do NOT avoid testing in order to avoid Isolation or Quarantine.** If you test positive, isolation in a hospital, under good medical supervision, is by far the best thing for you. It is true that household contacts of confirmed cases will be quarantined in government centers. Quarantine for your family, while unpleasant, is important if we are to stem the tide and not undo the months of good work done in Hong Kong to contain Coronavirus. Quarantine facilities are basic but clean, brand new and tolerable for two weeks – and apparently have good WiFi! Please do your bit, even if your bit is quarantine.

5. **Be just as careful with your domestic helpers as you are with yourselves.** They can be at risk both from you, and from their activities in their time off, in particular social gatherings and church services. It is wise to talk to them about the latter and be mindful of making sure they are adequately protected.

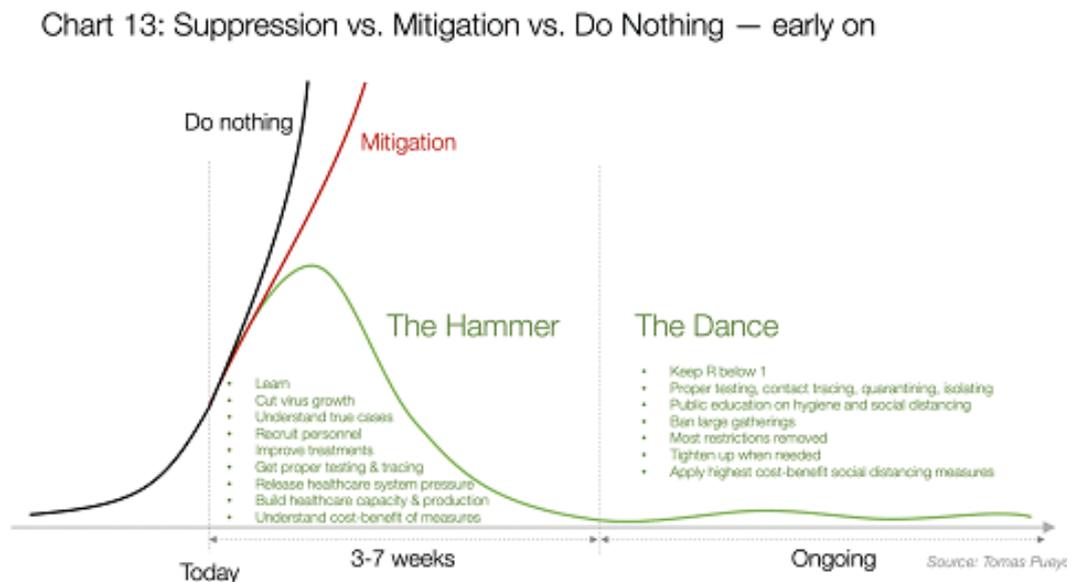
6. **And for everyone:**

- **MAXIMISE SOCIAL DISTANCING.** For the next two weeks, don't socialize, don't go to gyms, cinemas, bars, restaurants, meal gatherings or parties and if you can, work from home. Social distance from elderly and vulnerable relatives. Don't attend religious services in person. The more we can do this in the immediate future, the shorter the period of pain will be.
- Continue maximal personal hygiene measures. Cover your cough. Wash your hands. Use your own pen. Don't shake hands or hug. Clean your phone regularly.
- Wear a mask in public
- Listen to expert advice, not internet rumours.
- If you have even a minor cold, do not go out. Self-isolate.
- If you are sick, please call us for remote consultation. We will make sure you are cared for.

7. **Don't ignore other health problems.** If you have not travelled and don't live with someone who has, it is safe to come to the clinic. We deal with all possible COVID cases remotely. But if you can't or don't wish to come in in person, we can also arrange a telephone or Skype consult for many problems.

8. **During this difficult period, look out for others.** Stay in touch with friends and loved ones. This is a time when social media (used wisely!) and the availability of internet connectivity is a lifeline. Keep sharing jokes, we love them!

We Hong Kongers know how to do this. Now is our moment. We must do this **BEFORE** we have a massive community outbreak unleashed by the new wave of imported infections. As the chart below (from a series of articles by Tomas Pueyo) shows, bringing down The Hammer early on is really the only viable action. If we do it well, we can relax it in a couple of weeks. The sooner we do it, the shorter that period will be. It requires every individual to do their part.



When healthcare systems get overwhelmed, they collapse and many people die, too many to contemplate. People die because they can't access care for severe Coronavirus disease. And they die because hospitals are too overwhelmed to provide care for other medical problems that continue to happen.

A few weeks ago, I might have said this was catastrophizing. But we are seeing it happen right now in first world countries, like Italy, France and Spain.

When healthcare systems are overwhelmed , the fatality rate goes up by at least ten fold.

How long will we have to do this?

In Hong Kong, our healthcare system is not overwhelmed. Isolation beds are getting full, but we are still able to cope. We were successful with our first wave, from China, by taking what seemed to some like overly drastic actions immediately. If we do the same now, we will reap the benefits later, in avoiding a serious epidemic spiking in the weeks to come.

Modelling by Imperial College London suggests that it is possible that we may have to deal with waves of intense social distancing measures for up to 18 months, until we can deploy an effective vaccine. That does not mean 18 months of complete shutdown. But it may mean intermittent cycles of strict measures (“the Hammer” as in the diagram above) cycling with periods where they can be relaxed (“the Dance”). During the intervals of relaxation, we would rely on rapid testing, isolation and quarantine coupled with less restrictive social distancing measures.

In other words, we may have to get used to a “new normal” for some time to come.

Some good news

Amidst all this doom and gloom there is some good news.

For our pregnant patients, there are currently no data suggesting an increased risk of miscarriage or early pregnancy loss in relation to COVID-19. In addition, as there is no evidence of intrauterine fetal infection with COVID-19 it is currently considered unlikely that there will be congenital effects of the virus on fetal development.

Pregnant women seem to be at no increased risk of contracting the infection compared to others, and there is no data suggesting they are a particularly vulnerable group. We do know that pregnant women may be more prone to becoming severely ill with other viral infections, and do advise that you to continue to take good preventive measures.

Spanish flu disproportionately affected 20 to 40 year olds. Fortunately, COVID-19

does not target children or young adults as severely as older people. They can still become infected and pass the infection on to others who are more vulnerable, and young adults are not entirely immune from severe disease. It is still a blessing, however, that these are not the people we are likely to lose to COVID-19.

Another silver lining is that pollution levels are greatly reduced. I haven't seen skies like these since I first moved to Hong Kong in 1998.

As the whole world is now taking this seriously, all stops have been pulled out to try to control this virus. The cavalry is coming. The ability of the human race to innovate and respond to acute challenges like this is astonishing. In my decades of medical practice, I've never seen research progress at this pace.

We leave you, as usual, with the reminder that this too will pass. We will be dealing with a storm raging around us, at varying levels of intensity, for some unknown period of time. The uncertainty is hard. The economic consequences are brutal. The rapidity with which many western countries have been overwhelmed is frightening. But we are still safe here, and we know how to cope with this.

The human spirit is resilient. Epidemics have shaped society for centuries – think about the Black Death, plague, cholera, Spanish Flu, HIV/AIDS and SARS. Our forefathers survived two World Wars in the past century. Economies recovered and life bloomed again afterwards. The new coronavirus will most probably be added to this list and become part of our collective memory as an event that changed the world.

Ironically, the more quickly public health measures succeed in controlling this Pandemic, the less we will appreciate them. We won't see what was averted. Remember that everything being done is worth it. We are all in this together

Meanwhile, Keep Calm, Keep your Social Distance, and Wash Your Hands!

For more information:

[What we are doing to keep you safe](#)

[Self-Isolation and Home Quarantine](#)

[Optimising Distance Learning](#)

[Managing Anxiety & Uncertainty Through the Health Crisis](#)

[Supporting Children Through The Health Crisis](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Myths and Rumours](#)

[Your Questions Answered](#) – UPDATED WITH INFORMATION ABOUT
IBUPROFEN AND BLOOD PRESSURE MEDICATIONS