

Hong Kong to shut all schools after virus cases spike

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Hong Kong will close all schools after a spike in locally transmitted coronavirus infections, the city's education minister said Friday.

Schools will close from Monday, bringing forward the start of the summer holidays, Kevin Yeung said, after the city recorded an "exponential growth" of locally transmitted cases in the past few days.

The finance hub recorded 38 new confirmed cases on Friday, 32 of which were locally transmitted.

The spike marks a setback for the city, where daily lives were returning to normal with restaurants and bars resuming normal business and cultural attractions reopening.

Despite being right next to mainland China where the outbreak emerged in late 2019, the city had largely managed to quash local transmissions in recent months.

But new infection clusters started to emerge since Tuesday, including at an elderly care home that reported at least 32 cases and a housing estate that reported 11 cases.

At least 21 new infections in the last five days have been classified as unknown in origin, meaning authorities are struggling to work out how the disease is spreading.

Authorities were facing "difficulties" in tracing the sources and the close contacts of those infected in the new cluster, said Dr Chuang Shuk-kwan from Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection.

All secondary schools, primary schools and kindergartens would close from July 13, Yeung said, adding that schools would still be allowed to hold important examinations.

Hong Kong's public high schools were closed in January amid the early stages of the virus outbreak, and were gradually re-opened from May after the territory successfully curbed new infections.

Health authorities on Thursday announced a reintroduction of limits on how many people can gather in restaurants, bars and fitness centres.

A maximum of eight people can sit together at restaurants while bars, pubs and nightclubs are capped at four people per table.

Hong Kong has reported 1,403 cases of the virus and seven deaths.

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