

Hong Kong to impose new virus restrictions to battle fourth wave

December 8 2020



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Hong Kong will ban evening dining at restaurants and close fitness centres, the city's leader said Tuesday, as part of new measures aimed at stemming a fourth wave of coronavirus infections.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the rules will come into effect on Thursday and aim to reduce the "number of people on the streets",

echoing moves taken by authorities when cases spiked earlier this year.

Dining out will be banned after 6 pm, beauty and massage parlours will be forced to close, and civil servants would be asked to work from home, she said.

Hong Kong's strict social distancing measures have largely helped keep infections to under 7000 in the city of 7.5 million, with 112 deaths.

But daily recorded cases have risen again to more than 100 on several occasions in recent weeks, the highest level since July.

Speaking ahead of a weekly meeting with policy advisers, Lam said "the strictness of social distancing measures must at least return to the level" of the outbreak's peak in the city in July and August.

Schools, bars and nightclubs have already been ordered to close.

The city's health minister Sophia Chan, speaking later on Tuesday, said the measures would last for two weeks from Thursday until December 23.

Fines for breaching mask-wearing or social gathering rules will be increased to HK\$5,000 (\$645) from Friday, she said.

Authorities fought the spread of Hong Kong's initial outbreak at the start of the year by shutting schools and restricting travel across the city's border with mainland China, where the virus was first detected.

The territory endured two more COVID-19 infection spikes over the spring and summer, prompting tighter quarantine protocols and economically painful social distancing rules for restaurants and other businesses.

Last week Hong Kong reimposed some of their strictest social distancing measures since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Restrictions on public gatherings were tightened with a maximum of two people allowed to meet, down from four.

Authorities have also launched a hotline for residents to report social distancing breaches.

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