

Hong Kong gyms, bars and cinemas reopen as virus measures ease

May 8 2020, by Celia Cazale



People celebrated the return of some normalcy to Hong Kong as gyms and bars opened on Friday

Hong Kong began to ease major social distancing measures on Friday with bars, gyms, beauty parlours and cinemas reopening their doors after

the financial hub largely halted local transmissions of the deadly coronavirus.

Queues formed outside gyms in the semi-autonomous Chinese city on Friday morning for employees to check temperatures as people celebrated the return of some normalcy to the city.

Doris, a 39-year-old yoga teacher, said her first classes were already filled after weeks of teaching online.

"I'm excited to share again... and see my students," she told AFP.

"I was quite impatient to get back to the gym," added Alexandre, a 26-year-old finance worker after completing a workout in the city's commercial district.

"It shows that life is starting to get back to normal even though we haven't been locked up like in Europe," he added.

Will Sutton, an American resident, tweeted pictures of his local gym with partitions placed between running machines.

"After three weeks without a workout, whatever... let's just get back to sweating!" he wrote.

The less health-conscious flocked to watering holes, some of which opened their doors as soon as the clock struck midnight.

"Last month we lost a lot of money," bar manager Nikita told AFP as he received the first punters in four weeks. "But still, we are just super happy to be back open."

Most of Hong Kong's entertainment venues were shuttered in early April

when the city suffered a second wave of infections—primarily residents returning from Europe and North America as the pandemic spread rapidly there.

But health officials have made impressive headway against the disease thanks to efficient testing, tracing and treatment programmes with just over 1,000 infections and four deaths.

New COVID-19 cases have been in the single digits for the last 18 days—with eleven days showing a zero tally. All new infections are residents returning from overseas who are quickly quarantined.

No dancing, no live music

In a city mired in recession the reopening of many businesses will be welcome. But the threat of the virus means certain restrictions remain in place.

Bars are permitted to operate at half-capacity and must ensure a distance of 1.5 metres between tables, while live music performances and dancing remain banned.

Gyms, cinemas and beauty parlours must also ensure social distancing—such as adequate space between yoga mats—as well as temperature checks and hand sanitiser.

Pure, one of the biggest yoga chains, said it would limit classes to a maximum of eight people while bowling alleys are only opening every other lane.

Authorities have also lifted the limit on how many people can gather in public from four to eight.

Restaurants will also now be allowed to take bookings from groups of up to eight people.

Nightclubs and karaoke businesses will remain closed for now because health officials regard them as "high risk".

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