

Coronavirus: Unions urges medics to halt work if Hong Kong Hospital Authority cannot provide adequate protective gear

Thursday 13 February 2020, by [CHENG Kris](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2020).

The Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) has called upon members to halt work if they are not provided with adequate protective gear in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

The union launched a strike last week to urge the government to close the border with mainland China and improve the protective gear given to staff members. It said the Hospital Authority has refused to reveal the amount of protective gear they have in stock.

Globally, there have been over 60,000 confirmed cases of the new SARS-like "covid-19" virus and over 1,360 deaths. Medical professionals in Hong Kong have repeatedly complained about a lack of protective gear amid a city-wide shortage.

The HAEA said it has sought legal advice over work safety, adding that the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance states that employers must provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment.

"If our bodies may be harmed, employees do not have to follow instructions given by their superiors to work, and employers have no power to take action," it said.

"If we need to enter airborne infection isolation rooms and our employer cannot provide adequate protection gear, the Hospital Authority cannot force employees to work under such conditions," it added.

The union also said staff members can use their own equipment including masks to reduce the chance of infection. *"But have you seen police officers buying their own guns for work?"* it added.

The Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff (AHKNS), one of the largest medical unions in the city, also passed a motion at a meeting on Tuesday demanding the Hospital Authority provide adequate gear.

It said patients staying on a ward should have two masks each day and alcohol-based hand rub at their beds.

Frontline nurses should have four surgical masks and four sets of personal protective equipment. This includes full-body gear each day, whilst nurses working in high-risk wards should have two surgical masks, two N95 masks and four sets of personal protective equipment, according to the AHKNS.

P.S.

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