

Coronavirus: Basic protective gear ‘unaffordable’ for 70% of Hong Kong’s low-income families - survey

Monday 24 February 2020, by [CREERY Jennifer](#) (Date first published: 25 February 2020).

Nearly 70 per cent of Hong Kong low-income families surveyed said they cannot afford to buy protective items such as surgical face masks and alcohol rub amid the coronavirus outbreak, according to findings released on Sunday.

In a survey of 397 respondents, aged between 36 and 50, anti-poverty NGO the Society for Community Organisation (SoCO) found that only 33.2 per cent of families said they felt they could afford disinfectants and other virus protection items – including soap and bleach – while 66.8 per cent said they could not.

Hong Kong reported its 79th case of the coronavirus on Monday, bringing the total in over a dozen countries total most 80,000 by Monday night. More than 2,600 have died since the new strain was detected in China’s Hubei province. Global surgical masks and other protective supplies have diminished since the start of the outbreak.

The SoCO survey also found that:

98 per cent of respondents had surgical masks, and 80.9 per cent had hand wash or soap, most of which was donated by SoCO and other NGOs;

57.9 per cent said they had obtained children’s masks;

56.7 per cent had bleach;

50.6 per cent had alcohol-based hand rub;

And 37.8 per cent had disinfectant wet tissue.

Earlier this month, the government announced the introduction of an HK\$30 million relief package to alleviate financial hardships due to the outbreak. The measure was approved by lawmakers last Friday.

“[The] Hong Kong government is putting every effort to fight this infection,” Chief Executive Carrie Lam previously said. “We will continue to work very hard based on our very good track record in our public health experience and expertise.”

Lam’s administration has come under fire for refusing to enforce a full border closure with mainland China; instead, sealing 11 out of the city’s 15 checkpoints.

Financial pressure

More than 60 per cent of respondents to SoCO’s survey said their monthly household income had reduced by nearly half – representing a decrease of around HK\$2,001 to HK\$6,000 – owing to fewer work opportunities.

Additionally, 60.2 per cent said they have been prevented from visiting relatives because of cross-

border travel restrictions.

More than 80 per cent reported increased “mental burden” related to the outbreak, while 50.9 per cent said they had experienced insomnia.

SoCO recommended the government provide more support for low-income families including strengthening remote teaching techniques for schoolchildren – such as E-learning, distributing free masks to households in need, expanding subsidy plans, providing financial support for those affected by cross-border travel restrictions, and investing in cleaning services.

Over 93 per cent of those interviewed were women with an average household size of four people. Most of them had manual labour jobs – 27.2 per cent worked in construction, 20.7 per cent in personal services, 16.9 per cent in restaurants and other industries. Respondents’ average monthly household income, excluding Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and other allowances, ranged from HK\$10,000 to HK\$20,000.

P.S.

<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2020/02/25/coronavirus-basic-protective-gear-unaffordable-70-hong-kongs-low-income-families-survey/>