



Public Health

Hong Kong's population of about 7.0 million in 2009 mid-year is provided with a comprehensive range of medical and health services by the public and private sectors.

The Department of Health (DH) is the Government's health adviser and regulatory authority. It safeguards community health through a range of promotional, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

The Hospital Authority (HA) is an independent body responsible for the management of all public hospitals. It provides medical treatment and rehabilitation services to patients through hospitals, specialist clinics and outreach services.

As at end December 2008, the number of hospital beds were about 35 000, comprising 27 229 beds in 38 public hospitals under the HA, 3 712 in 13 private hospitals, 3 347 in 34 nursing homes and 760 in correctional institutes. The bed-population ratio was about 5 beds per thousand population. Comparable figures in other countries are: Britain 3.57 (2006), United States 3.20 (2005), Japan 12.73 (2006), Korea 7.28 (2007), Malaysia 1.78 (2006) and Singapore 3.22 (2007).

As at end December 2008, there were 12 215 medical practitioners registered with the Hong Kong Medical Council — 11 251 on the resident list and 964 on the non-resident list, equivalent to 1.75 medical practitioners per thousand population. In Britain, there were 2.20 (2006), in United States, 3.09 (2006), in Japan, 2.18 (2006), in Korea, 2.23 (2007), in Malaysia, 0.82 (2006), and in Singapore, 2.06 (2007) doctors per thousand population. The numbers of medical practitioners working in the DH and the HA are about 433 and 4 959 respectively.

Although Western medicine in both its curative and preventive forms is entirely acceptable to Chinese people in Hong Kong, many still consult Chinese medicine practitioners. As at end December 2008, there were 5 932 registered Chinese medicine practitioners (including 72 registered Chinese medicine practitioners with limited registration) and 2 823 listed Chinese medicine practitioners.

Government/Public Services: At the end of 2008, the DH operates 31, maternal and child health centres on Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. In addition, the HA runs 48 specialist out-patient clinics and 74 general out-patient clinics throughout Hong Kong.

In the more populous areas, polyclinics or specialist clinics provide specialist clinic sessions besides general out-patient services. Evening general out-patient sessions are held at 21 clinics in the more densely populated areas and 11 of them also operate on Sundays and public holidays.

Treatment at a government general out-patient clinic costs \$45 a visit for Hong Kong residents, which includes

medicine as well as X-ray examinations, laboratory tests, etc. If the patient requires a specialist's opinion, he is referred to a specialist clinic for consultation, which costs him \$100 for the first attendance, \$60 for follow-up and \$10 per drug item. The charge may be waived if the patient cannot afford the charges. Cases of tuberculosis, leprosy and venereal disease are given free treatment, while maternity and child health guidance, including antenatal and postnatal care of the mother and the entire immunisation programme for the child, is also free.

In 2008, the total number of attendances at government and the HA out-patient clinics were about 7.2 million and 13.1 million respectively. Cases of acute illness and accident casualties are carried by ambulance to the Accident and Emergency Department of Queen Mary Hospital, Ruttonjee Hospital or Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital on Hong Kong Island; St. John Hospital in Cheung Chau; Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Caritas Medical Centre or United Christian Hospital in Kowloon; and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, North District Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital, Pok Oi Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, Tuen Mun Hospital, Tseung Kwan O Hospital or Yan Chai Hospital in the New Territories. For Hong Kong residents, the charge for the emergency treatment at Accident and Emergency Department is \$100.

Hong Kong residents staying in the general wards of public hospitals are charged \$50 for the admission fee, \$100 per day occupying acute beds (or \$68 per day occupying non-acute beds) for diet, X-ray examinations, laboratory tests, medicine within the scales provided by the hospitals, and any form of special treatment required, including surgery, radiotherapy, physiotherapy, etc. Again this daily charge may be waived if patient cannot afford the charges. In 2008, about 1 269 000 discharge episodes in public hospitals.

The HA's Community Nursing Service provides further care to patients discharged from hospitals in their homes.

Private Services: Fees charged by private practitioners in Hong Kong vary, usually from about \$100 to \$250 or more for a specialist consultation. In some cases, these fees include the cost of medicine, but separate charges are often made. Patients also have to pay extra for laboratory tests, X-ray examinations, etc.

As at the end of 2008, there were 13 private hospitals, including the Hong Kong Central Hospital, the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital, the Matilda and War Memorial Hospital and the Shatin International Medical Centre Union Hospital, all run by private enterprises; and missionary hospitals such as the Canossa Hospital, the St. Paul's Hospital, the Hong Kong Baptist Hospital, the Precious Blood Hospital, the St. Teresa's Hospital, the Evangel Hospital, the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital and the Tsuen Wan Adventist Hospital; and the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer

Society Jockey Club Cancer Rehabilitation Centre run by The Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society.

In 2008, over 340 000 patients were treated in these hospitals on attendances basis. The charges vary from \$380 a day for a bed in a general ward to \$980 or more for a first class ward. Patients have to pay for all services, such as medicines and dressings, besides the daily attendance fees of doctors.

Medical Clinics: Under the Medical Clinics Ordinance, all clinics are required to be re-registered annually. At the end of 2008, there were 146 clinics registered under this ordinance. The charity medical clinics generally provide low-cost medical care.

Student Health Service: The service, operated by the DH, aims to promote the health of school children. A comprehensive range of promotive and preventive services which cater for the health needs of the students at various stages of their development is provided at the student health service centres. Services include physical examination, health assessment, individual counselling and health education. Students found to have problems will be referred to a special assessment centre or appropriate specialists for further management. At the end of 2007, a total of 12 student health service centres and three special assessment centres have been established to provide services to some 860 000 primary and secondary school students.

Preventive Services: Hong Kong people have continued to enjoy good health, due to the extensive preventive measures implemented by the Government through its Family Health Service, Elderly Health Services, the Port Health Service, the Student Health Service, the School Dental Care Service as well as many other community health services.

Children are given a series of immunisations against ten childhood infectious diseases in maternal and child health centres under the DH. Family planning service is also available at a charge of \$1 for every visit.

These preventive services have contributed to Hong Kong's remarkably low infant and maternal mortality rates, which are comparable to the best in the world. They have also kept Hong Kong, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, free from epidemics of major communicable diseases.

Chinese Medicine: The Chinese Medicine Ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council in July 1999 to establish a statutory regulatory framework to control the practice, use, manufacture and trading of Chinese medicine. The regulatory framework will enhance public health protection and greatly improve public confidence in the use of Chinese medicine. Under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong was set up to be responsible for implementing various regulatory measures.

As at December 2008, HA establishes 12 Chinese Medicine Centres. Treatment at these centres costs \$120 per visit (including two doses of Chinese herb).