

Strategic Topics Grant

Topic 4: Managing the Socio-economic Implications of Pandemic and Other Public Health Challenges

Project Title: Improving pandemic preparedness by reflecting on experiences in the COVID-19 pandemic from different perspectives

Project Coordinator: Professor Benjamin Cowling

Abstract

Respiratory virus pandemics occur at unpredictable intervals. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, stringent public health and social measures (PHSMs) were implemented to control transmission and prevent high levels of morbidity and mortality. The development of effective vaccines and antiviral drugs allowed a gradual relaxation of non-pharmaceutical measures in most parts of the world in 2021 and 2022, with China's transition to "living with the virus" in December 2022 being one of the final locations to end COVID restrictions. It is important to recognize that the consequences of the pandemic far exceed the impact on physical health, and also include social and economic harms that may take many years to recover from. Here, we propose a series of complementary research activities in four areas to identify efficient approaches to mitigate the socio-economic-mental health impact of future pandemics while at the same time controlling the threat posed to public health by infections. Hong Kong provides a unique opportunity as an important social laboratory for this work, given the implementation of strong measures for an extended period as well as the continual challenge of introduced infections due to the city's global nature. Our overarching aim is to provide evidence that can improve global pandemic preparedness, as well as provide an evidence base for future policy recommendations in Hong Kong and elsewhere. While a future pandemic could have different characteristics and therefore potentially require a different set of control measures, we aim to identify common principles and best practices that can be integrated into pandemic planning to guide public policy decisions in future pandemics.

策略專題研究資助金

主題四：管理疫症和其他公共衛生挑戰對社會經濟的影響

項目名稱：多角度反思 2019 冠狀病毒病大流行的經驗以提升對傳染病大流行的應對能力

項目統籌：高本恩教授

簡介

呼吸道病毒大流行的發生難以預測。在 2019 冠狀病毒病大流行初期，嚴格的公共衛生和社交措施被廣泛用以控制病毒傳播並防止高發病率和死亡率。有效疫苗和抗病毒藥物的開發使世界大部分地區在 2021 和 2022 年間逐步放寬非藥物措施成為可能，其中，中國於 2022 年 12 月改行“與病毒共存”，成為結束新冠疫情限制的最終站之一。我們需要認清大流行帶來的後果不但遠超對身體健康的影響，還包括需要多年才可能恢復的社會和經濟危害。因此，我們提出在四個領域開展一系列的互補性研究活動，以探索在控制感染造成的公共衛生威脅的同時，可以用於減輕未來傳染病大流行對社會經濟及心理健康影響的有效方法。鑑於香港於新冠疫情期間在較長時間內實施了高強度的防疫措施，同時，香港的全球性使此地持續面對外來感染的挑戰，這些都為這項重要的社會實驗提供了獨特的機會。我們的首要目標是提供可以改善全球大流行應對能力的證據，並為香港和其他地方的未來防疫政策提供證據基礎。雖然未來傳染病大流行的表現或有所不同，因而可能需要另一套防疫措施，但我們致力於探求一套可納入大流行規劃的核心原則和最優方案，用於指導未來大流行公共政策的制定。