



Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce  
香港總商會 1861

5 May 2003

Dear Friends of the Chamber,

“Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome” (SARS), or “Atypical Pneumonia” as it is also called, continues to cause a great deal of concern and anxiety internationally. I would like to brief you on the situation in Hong Kong and to give you the facts as we know them. The SARS virus has been affecting Hong Kong for more than a month, but the WHO said a week ago that the epidemic has passed the peak in Hong Kong. Indeed, the number of new cases in Hong Kong is coming down rapidly.

For a disease with so many unknowns, it is natural to have many “experts” who trade opinion as fact, in some instances creating unnecessary concern. In view of this, we believe that it is important to keep your business community informed with accurate information about the SARS situation in Hong Kong. I hope you can share the information with your members and your business contacts.

Even in the worst period of three weeks ago, life in Hong Kong carried on. As Dr. David Baltimore, the President of Caltech, a Nobel laureate in medicine, put it recently in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, “Given what’s happened thus far, the appropriate response (to SARS) is to pursue targeted and aggressive public-health measures, while the 99.9% not conceivably at risk go on with their lives.”

That is exactly what Hong Kong has been doing. People in Hong Kong are taking a balanced approach to SARS. Travel has been curtailed, the tourist and retail and restaurant sectors have suffered, but people are carrying on as best as they can and working at their jobs. For example, nimble and innovative Hong Kong export firms are finding new ways to connect with customers, including setting up temporary showrooms overseas. Trade fairs are going ahead for an extended spring buying season, with stringent health protection measures in place. And once the WHO travel advisory against “non-essential” travel to Hong Kong is lifted — and we would hope that could happen in a few weeks or less, you will find Hong Kong business people going full force in re-engaging with customers and potential clients.

We have a transparent system here with top-notch medical care. Our super-dedicated medical personnel are slowly winning the battle against SARS, with the citizens well informed on preventative measures to curb the spread of SARS. Hong Kong people are

finding the will to get through the crisis, both individually and united as a community. To date, among the 1,600 infected patients, over 900 have recovered, with more and more discharged everyday. The number of new cases per day has just reached single digit. Unfortunately, around 180 have died, but most of the fatalities were elderly and suffering from other chronic illness.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's strengths as a regional business hub, and its hard-earned reputation for resilience and flexibility, make Hong Kong as important to international business today as it was before the emergence of SARS. It is an excellent location to be a springboard into China. China — after it controls its own SARS problem — will continue to be the fastest growing economy in Asia which cannot be ignored by any far-sighted company. And Hong Kong provides you a comforting and efficient location to do this business with China.

We encourage you to contact us should you have further concerns or questions regarding the developing SARS situation in Hong Kong. You may want to visit our website at [www.chamber.org.hk](http://www.chamber.org.hk) for updated information on SARS. Attached you will also find a list of resources and important facts that our organization has found both educational and objective. While the media has focused on the drama, you will, from looking at the facts, realize that SARS is just another challenge that we will end up overcoming.

I hope you find the letter useful. When the WHO lifts the travel advisory against Hong Kong, we will be writing to you again to give you details of a “re-launch” of Hong Kong. We look forward to seeing you after then!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Nightingale". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anthony" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Nightingale".

Anthony Nightingale  
Chairman

## Some Medical Facts

- It is still unclear where and how the SARS virus originated. It is also unclear exactly how it is transmitted, though it is not airborne, and appears to be spread by droplets and close personal contact – essentially, the exchange of bodily fluids. As such, the illness appears to be hard to catch. In addition, scientists tell us that the virus does not live that long after leaving the body, and therefore, any goods or packages or letters sent from Hong Kong is safe and virus-free.
- It has currently affected 0.02% of the Hong Kong population – just over 1,600 people. The pattern of new cases every day has shown a slow decrease over a period representing more than 8 cycles of infectivity. This suggests an illness that is not spreading like an epidemic would. It is less infectious than influenza, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).
- It is still not certain when in its development this virus becomes infective, but all indications are that the infective period is when the person has a fever above 38 degrees celsius. Medical experts say the slow increase in new cases suggests a virus that is unlikely to be highly contagious before symptoms develop.
- The illness has symptoms very similar to a severe influenza. While this is unpleasant, 90% of victims have recovered in response to treatment. Almost all of those that have died were either elderly or had serious illnesses that compromised their immunity.
- For comparison, note that “typical” pneumonia affects 12 out of every 1000 people in the Northern Hemisphere every year, and has an overall mortality of 13.8% (Clinical Evidence 2002). The majority of these deaths occur – as with SARS – with elderly people or those with other illness.
- For further comparison, note that West Nile disease, which caused alarm in the New York area when it erupted in New York in August 2002, has so far infected 4,000 people, has still not been eradicated, and has killed over 270.

**Please check our website, [www.chamber.org.hk](http://www.chamber.org.hk) , for updated information on SARS in Hong Kong, you can find further useful information on SARS on these web-links:**

- Hong Kong Department of Health: [www.info.gov.hk/dh/ap.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/dh/ap.htm)
- Hong Kong Medical Association: [www.hkma.org](http://www.hkma.org)
- World Health Organization: [www.who.int/csr/sars](http://www.who.int/csr/sars)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.org](http://www.cdc.org)