

As Hong Kong schools close again, frazzled parents go back to juggling jobs, monitoring kids' online lessons

- Teachers deal with online teaching challenges too, finding ways to keep students attentive amid Covid-19 pandemic
- Stress levels rise as parents devise ways to supervise schoolwork, attend office meetings



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Wong Shui-ying (centre) with her seven-year-old son Leung Yu-wang and 10-year-old daughter Leung Yee-tung at their home in Shek Kip Mei. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Hong Kong's fourth wave of Covid-19 infections has closed schools for the rest of the year, leaving some parents bristling at having to cope once again with juggling their jobs and having their children at home.

It means supervising their children doing schoolwork over tablet computers, monitoring them via WhatsApp text messages, or leaning more on domestic workers to share the load.

Stay-at-home mother Wong Shui-ying, 43, says her 10-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son get frustrated being confined to their 300 square foot flat in a public housing estate in Sham Shui Po, and her daughter's schoolwork suffers when she stays home.

"I would like the kids to go to school," she says. "I am not that worried about the coronavirus, because I think their school does a good job cleaning the premises."



Working mother Mangie Wong (left) with her two daughters and mother. Photo: Handout

Hong Kong schools were first shut in early February after Covid-19 struck the city, then reopened in June. When a third wave of infections arrived in July, they were closed once again before reopening in September.

Hong Kong's two biggest teachers' unions agree the shutdown is needed, but an online petition has collected more than 1,500 signatures from parents urging the government to reconsider the suspension for kindergartens and nurseries.

They want the authorities to prioritise other options, including closing only schools affected by Covid-19 or those in neighbourhoods with a high number of infections.

Hong Kong has seen a surge in coronavirus infections, with more than 6,500 confirmed cases so far, and 111 fatalities.

Working mother Mangie Wong, 35, recalls that her three-year-old daughter Maia Tse's first day of kindergarten in September was nerve-racking, with the toddler crying for 30 minutes.

Children in masks and matching uniforms lined up to have their temperature checked before only an hour of classes. There were no snack breaks to avoid having the children remove their masks.

Wong, who also has a younger daughter, aged two, says that aside from the first day, Maia soon began enjoying school. "She loved going to school and seeing the teachers and the other kids. She would come home and tell me all her experiences," she says.

Classes were gradually increased to three hours a day, but it was only a month before schools were shut and Maia had to switch to doing her lessons over a tablet computer.