

Applications for Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme to start tomorrow

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (May 4) announced that applications for the Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund will start tomorrow (May 5).

An FEHD spokesman said, "Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemics, the Government has imposed social distancing measures, issuing directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (the Regulation) (Cap. 599F) to restrict the operation of catering business and specified premises, and requiring certain premises (including karaoke establishments, nightclubs and bars or pubs, which are concurrently holding a food licence) to close. The business of catering outlets with seating areas (i.e. selling or supplying food and beverages for consumption on their premises) have been hard hit by the epidemics and the social distancing measures. The FEHD launches the Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme to provide financial relief measures to the above catering sector. It is estimated that the scheme will benefit about 16 000 catering outlets and their employees."

The scheme provides subsidies ranging from \$250,000 to \$2,200,000 to eligible licence holders of general restaurants, light refreshment restaurants, marine restaurants and factory canteens in operation according to the floor area of the premises as specified on the licence, primarily in support of payment of employees' salaries during a six-month period following approval of the application. To provide immediate relief to the catering sector, the subsidy will be dished out upfront, in two tranches.

To avoid abuse, an applicant at the time of application shall –

- (1) undertake that there would be no redundancy of staff for three months on receipt of the first tranche of subsidy and another three months on receipt of the second tranche;
- (2) undertake that not less than 80 per cent of the subsidies for respective months would be used to pay salaries of staff working at the premises;
- (3) undertake to submit within a specified period a certificate issued by a Certified Public Accountant (practising) (CPA) on its total staff salaries and total number of salaried staff for each of the months covered by the subsidy;
- (4) submit a certificate issued by a CPA on its total staff salaries and total number of staff working at the premises (salaried or otherwise) for the month of March 2020 which would be taken into account in checking compliance after disbursement of subsidy; and
- (5) declare that it has not submitted and will not submit any application under the Employment Support Scheme, to avoid double benefits.

Moreover, each eligible catering outlet directed to close whole of its licensed premises under the Regulation, including karaoke establishments, nightclubs and bars or pubs, is eligible for a further one-off subsidy of \$50,000.

Eligible food licence, liquor licence or karaoke establishment permit holders should submit their applications to the District Environmental Hygiene Offices of the FEHD (to the corresponding licensing offices for liquor licences) in person or by mail. Food licence holders could also submit their applications through the FEHD website (www.fehd.gov.hk). The deadline for application is June 5. The target is that upon receipt of the completed application form and supporting documents and after verification, the disbursement of the first tranche of subsidies could generally be made in approximately two to three weeks by crossed cheques to the corresponding licensed food premises.

The application form and guidelines can be downloaded from the website of the FEHD (www.fehd.gov.hk) or be obtained from District Environmental Hygiene Offices of the FEHD starting from tomorrow. For details, please visit the website of the FEHD.

Up to April 29, 2020, over 28 900 applications have been received under the Food Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme in the first round of the Anti-epidemic Fund. Over \$3.6 billion subsidies have been authorised for payment to eligible food licence holders.