

FEHD issues updated directions and guidelines on provision of dine-in services

In the light of the latest public health risk assessment on COVID-19, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (August 27) provided updated guidelines on the provision of dine-in services to licensees and operators of food premises so as to give them a practical framework and recommendations for taking corresponding measures to keep workers, customers and public safe.

Pursuant to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), the Secretary for Food and Health has issued the latest directions through notices published in the Gazette today which will take effect from tomorrow (August 28) to September 3. Catering business is allowed to provide dine-in services from 5am to 8.59pm subject to the following requirements: a person must wear a mask at any time except when the person is consuming food or drink; body temperature screening must be conducted before the person is allowed to enter the catering premises; tables must be arranged in a way to ensure there is a distance of at least 1.5 m or some form of partition which could serve as effective buffer between one table and another table; hand sanitisers must be provided for any person at the premises; the number of customers at any catering premises must not exceed 50% of the seating capacity of the premises; and no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises.

To facilitate licensees and operators of food premises to implement the above requirements, the FEHD recommends adopting the following measures:

(1) Effective partitioning

- Partition should be made of acrylic plastic or equivalent with a thickness of at least 3mm, and of a height that is at least above head level of customers when seated;
- Partition may be table-top or standing type, the coverage is preferably enclosed on three sides, leaving only the side where a customer is seated open;

(2) Segregation of duties and handling trolleys / trays / utensils

- Hygiene supervisor / hygiene manager should be tasked to check mask compliance and hand hygiene compliance on the premises;

- Separate staff should be tasked to setting table and serving food/drink; and collecting used utensils and cleaning used tables. If this is not practicable, the staff concerned should wash hands, use hand sanitisers or change gloves after each round of any of the above tasks. Hand sanitisers should also be placed at each table for use by customers;
- Separate trolleys/trays should be used for serving food/drink; and collecting used utensils. For easy identification by staff and to assure customers, such equipment should be signified for different purposes above in different colours or attached with labels. Tray lining, if used, must also be replaced every time after use;
- All utensils must be stored and covered properly. Utensils should not be placed at a table on a long-term basis, but should only be provided after each batch of customers are seated.

(3) Cleaning and disinfection

- Areas that people may frequently come into contact, such as door knobs, tabletops and seats, should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, in particular upon departure of customers, tabletop area including the partition must be cleansed and disinfected before the next batch of customers are seated;
- Trolleys/trays/utensils should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. All food trays, in particular the rims of trays, and utensils must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every time after use by customers;

(4) No sharing of tables

- No sharing of tables with strangers should be allowed. If this is not practicable, effective partitioning should be provided;
- Each set of ordered food should be served to the customers individually. If this is not practicable, communal cutleries such as chopsticks/spoons should be provided for use by customers; and

(5) Ventilation

- The cleaning, checking and repairing works on all parts of ventilation systems in the premises, including exhaust air outlets, filters, fresh air inlets and air ducts, etc, should be strengthened.

As a token of support to the catering sector in the fight against COVID-19 together, the FEHD is making arrangements for sending face masks to licensed food premises. To remind customers to strictly comply with the requirement to wear a mask except when eating or drinking, the FEHD has produced theme posters and audio clips for the trade to use at their food premises.

"The Government would keep the social distancing measures and guidelines under review in the light of the epidemic situation and relevant circumstances on the ground. The FEHD has also been discussing with public health experts and the catering sector on practicable measures to reduce the risk of spread of and infection by the virus. As an important part of the community's efforts in fighting the virus, the FEHD appeals to food business operators and food handlers to implement the above measures and guidelines in a concerted manner and persistent manner. The FEHD would take stringent enforcement actions against offenders in defiance of relevant legislation on prevention and control of disease as well as environmental hygiene and food safety issues," said a spokesman for the FEHD.