

FEHD reminds catering business operators and public to continue complying with anti-epidemic regulations

In view of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (December 9) reminded persons responsible for carrying on a catering business to strictly comply with the requirements and directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), and customers patronising catering premises to comply with the various anti-epidemic regulations and restrictions, including the requirements on group gatherings and wearing of masks.

The Government announced yesterday (December 8) that the social distancing measures would be further tightened. The latest directions issued by the Secretary for Food and Health in relation to catering business under Cap. 599F will take effect from tomorrow (December 10) to December 23 for a period of 14 days, which include requirements that a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must cease selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises of the business from 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day; and the number of people participating in a banquet in catering premises is limited to 20. Other requirements and restrictions on catering business will be maintained, including no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises, the total number of customers allowed in catering premises must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity; no live performance and dancing is allowed; a mask must be worn within the premises except when the person is consuming food or drink at a table therein; tables must be arranged in a way to ensure there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres or some form of partition which could serve as an effective buffer between one table and another table; body temperature screening must be conducted before the person is allowed to enter the catering premises; and hand sanitisers must be provided, etc.

In addition, a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must display the poster containing the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code at the entrance of the premises or at a conspicuous location which must be unobstructed at any one time so that it is readily accessible for scanning with a mobile phone by a person entering the catering premises and the size of the image of the poster displayed must not be less than 210 x 297 millimetres (A4 size).

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business contravenes the regulations under Cap. 599F, he or she is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months."

The Government has also increased the fixed penalty regarding violations of regulations related to group gathering and mask-wearing from \$2,000 to \$5,000, which will take effect on December 11 (Friday).

For customers in breach of the requirement on no more than two persons per table within catering premises, that group gathering falls within the group gathering prohibited under section 3(1)(b) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the offenders are liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000 for violating Cap. 599G.

Moreover, the spokesman stressed that as stipulated in section 5A(4) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I), eating or drinking not in compliance with the requirements under Cap. 599F is not regarded as a reasonable excuse. Therefore, within catering premises, for customers not wearing a mask when they are not eating or drinking at a table therein or when they are not eating or drinking, they are liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000 for contravening section 5A(1) of Cap. 599I.

The spokesman said that the FEHD has issued a letter to catering business operators reminding them to strictly comply with the above regulations and restrictions. In addition, the department will strengthen education and publicity, as well as advise and remind persons responsible for carrying on a catering business and the public of the relevant regulations and restrictions. The FEHD will also step up inspections and law enforcement, and conduct joint operations with the Police as needed, to take stringent enforcement actions against offenders.

Separately, in view of the cessation of dining-in from 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day every day from December 10 to 23, the FEHD has followed up on the provision of suitable dining places and arrangements during the above-mentioned period for the department's and outsourced contractors' night shift frontline staff entitled to meal breaks. The measures include:

(a) providing places such as using roll-call points or setting up marquees at suitable places, and providing tables and chairs for cleaning workers' use for dining purposes. If circumstances permit, the FEHD and its contractors will arrange for their workers to have lunch at staggered hours; and

(b) reminding cleaning workers to observe social distancing and follow other appropriate anti-epidemic measures when having meals. The department will put up posters at suitable places to remind them to comply with the Government's anti-epidemic regulations and maintain personal and environmental hygiene at all times to safeguard their own health and safety, and that of others.

The spokesman again appealed to catering business operators to comply with relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in a concerted and persistent manner, with a view to keeping their staff, customers and the public safe. Members of the public also have to comply with the related regulations and directions on group gatherings and mask-wearing at catering premises.