

Government amends regulations for adjustments to social distancing measures in stages

In respect of earlier announcements by the Government on March 21 and April 14 on adjustments to social distancing measures in three stages, the Chief Executive in Council approved today (April 20) amendments to the relevant provisions of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I).

The first item of amendment concerns the definition of group gathering under Cap. 599G and simplification of relevant procedures, empowering the Secretary for Food and Health to specify the maximum number of persons in a group gathering in public places (which must not be less than two persons). The Secretary for Food and Health will, in accordance with the amended Cap. 599G, specify the maximum number of persons in a group gathering in public places as four persons (except for gatherings of persons from the same household) with effect from tomorrow (April 21). Meanwhile, the prohibition of multi-household gathering in a private place involving more than two households imposed earlier under Cap. 599G will be lifted starting tomorrow.

The second item of amendment concerns the reasonable excuses for not wearing a mask under Cap. 599I, empowering the Secretary for Food and Health to make specification on whether engaging in strenuous physical activity in outdoor public places may be one of the reasonable excuses for not wearing a mask during a specified period. The Government emphasised that the adjustments to social distancing measures in the first stage do not cover the relaxation of mask-wearing requirement in public places. Members of the public must continue to wear a mask on all public transport and in public places. When they are present in a premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), whether it is an indoor or outdoor premises, all members of the public must wear a mask except for specific circumstances (such as when they are eating, having facial treatment and it is part of a religious ritual). It is in the Government's plan to allow members of the public not to wear a mask when being present in a country park or engaging in strenuous physical activity in outdoor places during the second stage of adjustments to social distancing measures when the epidemic situation permits in future.

A Government spokesman said, "Given the high transmissibility of the Omicron mutant strain, members of the public must still stay vigilant even the epidemic situation has subsided a little recently. They should also strictly comply with the applicable anti-epidemic measures with a view to minimising the risk of virus spread in the community. Members of the public should receive all of the required doses of vaccine as soon as possible, as well as encourage and arrange for relatives and friends who have not

completed a vaccination course, especially the elderly, to receive one of the two vaccines available in Hong Kong that are highly effective in preventing severe illness and death with no delay. This will offer protection to themselves and the community, building an anti-epidemic barrier, preventing a rebound of the epidemic and creating favourable conditions for further adjustments to social distancing measures. As long as everyone join hands to fight the epidemic together, Hong Kong will surely be able to relax social distancing measures in an orderly manner and overcome the fifth wave of the epidemic."