

Government announces latest disease prevention measures

The Government today (June 30) announced the latest disease prevention measures and arrangements under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), extending the social distancing measures in relation to catering business, scheduled premises and group gatherings in public places, as well as continuing the implementation of immigration control measures.

The World Health Organization and health experts advised that COVID-19 would not be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination. The Government thus is required to incorporate work in relation to disease prevention and control as well as infection management into the new normal of the daily operation of the society. To this end, the Government has all along adopted the "suppress and lift" strategy and strived to strike a balance among public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance, maintaining the various disease prevention measures while allowing room for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities of the society when the situation permits.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "We are currently at the 'lifting' phase under our 'suppress and lift' disease prevention strategy. In view of the latest public health risk assessment, the Government is of the view that this is an appropriate time to further relax the social distancing measures such that social and economic activities may further resume."

Social distancing measures

Taking into account the improvement in the epidemic situation and the Government's strategy in combating the disease, the Government will gazette today amendments and directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) to further relax the social distancing measures as follows:

Catering business and scheduled premises (Cap. 599F)

(1) On catering business, the restriction on the number of customers at a bar/pub will be relaxed by increasing such limit from not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of that premises and that part of the premises to 80 per cent. Other requirements and restrictions in relation to catering business premises will be maintained.

(2) On scheduled premises, the restriction on the number of persons at large-scale entertainment stations, machines or facilities at places of public entertainment, cinemas or all places of public entertainment with live

performance, as well as clubs or nightclubs, will be relaxed by increasing such cap from 50 per cent of the capacity to 80 per cent. Other requirements and restrictions in relation to scheduled premises will be maintained and enhanced based on actual circumstances.

Group gatherings (Cap. 599G)

(3) The number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places will be maintained at 50. Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings in public places will continue during the 14-day period set out in the paragraph below. Under the exempted group gatherings, the restriction on number of participants in group gatherings during religious activities will be relaxed by increasing such limit from not more than 50 per cent of the number of persons that may normally be accommodated on the premises as a place of worship to 80 per cent. The group gathering must be held at premises constructed or regularly used as a place of worship and in which no food or drink is served (except as part of a religious ritual).

The latest directions under Cap. 599F (details at Annex) and Cap. 599G will come into effect on July 3, 2020 for a period of 14 days till July 16, 2020.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and the managers of scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F would have committed a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Separately, any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such gathering, commits an offence under Cap. 599G. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months. Persons who participate in a prohibited group gathering may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty of \$2,000.

Immigration control measures

In addition to implementing social distancing measures in the community, limiting the movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implementing compulsory quarantine or other infection control measures are integral parts of Hong Kong's strategy for combating the epidemic. The Government has earlier amended the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) to introduce a mechanism to empower the Secretary for Food and Health to specify Category 1 specified places from which arrivals have to be subject to compulsory quarantine, as well as Category 2 specified places from which arrivals are excluded from the compulsory quarantine requirements subject to meeting certain conditions (such as obtaining a negative COVID-19 test result).

The Government has been working closely with relevant authorities of the Guangdong Province and the Macao Special Administrative Region on mutual

recognition of test results and mutual exemption from compulsory quarantine under the framework of joint prevention and control. Subject to the epidemic situation, we will consider relaxing the restrictions on cross-boundary movement of people among the three places within certain limits in order to facilitate those with essential needs to travel between Guangdong and Hong Kong or between Hong Kong and Macao. The statutory framework of Cap. 599C is necessary for implementation of the arrangements concerning cross-boundary movement of people. The Government will publish in the Gazette today legislative amendments to extend the expiry date of Cap. 599C by a month to August 7, 2020. The Government will announce the relevant details when the outcome of the latest discussions on the arrangements concerning cross-boundary movement of people is available.

"It has come to our attention that the epidemic in many overseas countries has rebounded with a drastic increase in new cases after relaxation of social distancing measures, necessitating reintroduction of such measures. As such, we will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic situation and review the various measures in place from time to time with a view to making suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors. We also strongly urge the public to stay vigilant, maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives to minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community," said the spokesman.