

Government announces latest social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government will gazette today (May 19) directions and amendments 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 extend the social distancing measures in relation to catering businesses, scheduled premises and group gatherings in public places, as well as make appropriate adjustments to these measures having regard to the latest situation.

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The situation in Hong Kong has become more stabilised in terms of the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the recent weeks. However, in view of the three local cluster cases last week, the 'suppress and lift' strategy adopted to contain the epidemic and the impending school resumption, we should for now maintain the current social distancing measures subject to refinements to meet the operational needs of some businesses, and review them further depending on the future development of the epidemic situation."

In view of the need for worshippers to participate in religious activities raised by religious groups, the Government will relax the restrictions in relation to group gatherings for religious gatherings subject to fulfilment of suitable infection control requirements. However, having regard to the need on public health and infection control considerations, there is a need to maintain restrictions on public group gatherings. Details are as follows:

(1) The scope of existing exempted group gatherings (at Annex 1) will be expanded to cover religious gatherings during which no food or drink is served (except food or drink as part of a religious ritual). The exempted religious activities must be held at premises constructed as or converted into a place of worship, such as a church, monastery or nunnery, mosque, synagogue or temple; or premises regularly used as a place of worship. Measures must be in place for restricting the number of participants in the activity to not more than 50 per cent of the number of persons that may normally be accommodated on the premises as a place of worship.

(2) The prohibition of group gatherings with more than eight persons in public places under Cap. 599G will remain in force for 14 days until June 4, 2020.

In addition, the Government will take this opportunity to make adjustments to the directions under Cap. 599F, the latest relevant social distancing measures (requirements applicable to each type of premises at Annex 2) are as follows:

(3) For catering business, the requirements currently in force will be extended for 14 days i.e. effective from May 22 to June 4, 2020. Any mahjong-tin kau playing facility provided therein must comply with the applicable directions applicable to mahjong-tin kau premises at Annex 2.

(4) For scheduled premises which may continue to operate, the following key adjustments will be made to the conditions currently in force:

(a) fitness centre: each group training or class must consist of no more than eight persons including the coach; for a group training or class of more than eight persons, it must be conducted in a way to ensure there is at least 1.5 metres between each person (except the coach) and the coach must wear a mask at all times if he is not staying at a fixed location not less than 1.5 metres from other persons;

(b) place of public entertainment:

(i) no more than eight persons may be allowed at each entertainment station, machine or facility where applicable, or in the case of a large-scale entertainment station, machine or facility, the number of persons to be allowed at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the designed capacity of the entertainment station, machine or facility; and

(ii) catering premises in a place of public entertainment must comply with the applicable directions; and

(c) The requirements applicable to scheduled premises, including the above, will be effective from May 22 to June 4, 2020 for a period of 14 days.

(5) The following scheduled premises will be required to remain closed from May 22 to 28, 2020 for a period of seven days:

(a) bathhouse;

(b) party room;

(c) club or night club; and

(d) karaoke establishment.

The spokesperson added, "The above measures have balanced the oft-competing factors of public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance. They would help maintain social distancing while allowing room for gradual resumption of social activities. The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation and review the various measures in place from time to time with a view to suitably adjusting them taking into account all relevant factors."

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.