

Government announces latest social distancing measures

The Government gazetted the amendments, directions and specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) to adjust the social distancing measures appropriately. The arrangement for religious activities will take effect today (March 31). The other social distancing measures will take effect tomorrow (April 1) for a period of 14 days till April 14 (Wednesday) (the specified period).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Thanks to the efforts of the whole community in Hong Kong, the number of local confirmed cases has declined to less than five per day in average over the past week. To continue containing the spread of the disease, we need to maintain the majority of the social distancing measures and encourage more members of the public to get vaccinated as early as possible. As the Easter holiday is approaching, we will adjust the relevant restrictions for some activities with lower risks appropriately."

"We appeal to the public to remain patient, and continue to keep social distances during the Easter holiday, so that we could completely put off the fourth wave of the epidemic and achieve 'zero case' early. Furthermore, when the ratio of the vaccinated population reaches a higher level, it may be possible to have herd protection or immunity in the community, allowing the public to resume their normal life."

The details of the latest requirements and restrictions (see Annex 1 for requirements and restrictions under Cap. 599F) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business will be maintained during the specified period, including:

(a) Dedicated staff must be arranged in catering business premises for clearing used utensils and cleaning and disinfecting used tables and partitions. If this arrangement is not practicable, it must be ensured that the staff carrying out the aforementioned duties must adopt hand hygiene measures before switching to perform other duties, and should adopt hand hygiene measures as necessary during each round of cleaning-up duties. Hand hygiene measures include using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, washing hands or changing gloves.

(b) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business adopts specified infection control measures (including ensuring that users (excluding persons who only order takeaways) scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code

using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before the persons are allowed to enter the premises; and arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days), the catering premises can provide dine-in services from 5am to 9.59pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than four persons seated together at one table. The Government is exploring that staff of catering business premises who have completed vaccination (i.e. 14 days after receiving the second vaccine dose) would be deemed as having fulfilled the aforementioned regular testing requirement. Details will be announced in due course;

(c) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business does not adopt the specified infection control measures, the catering premises can only provide dine-in services from 5am to 5.59pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than two persons seated together at one table;

(d) Bars or pubs will continue to be closed;

(e) No live performance, dancing activity, karaoke or mahjong-tin kau activity is allowed in catering premises;

(f) The number of persons participating in any one banquet at any one time may not exceed 20 persons;

(g) Catering business premises should comply with specified requirements on air change or air purifier(s) by April 30; and

(h) Other requirements and restrictions, including that all persons must wear masks at any time in the premises except when eating or drinking, body temperature screening on persons before entering the premises and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Scheduled premises

(2) Swimming pools can be opened when the relevant requirements and restrictions are fulfilled, which include:

(a) Any person must wear a mask at all times (including when a coach is coaching) within any swimming pool except when the person is swimming, having a shower, walking from a changing room to a pool or vice versa, walking from a pool to another pool, or doing warm-up exercise with adequate distance or effective partition between persons;

(b) The number of persons to be allowed at any one time must not exceed 30 per cent of the designed capacity of the swimming pool;

(c) Except when doing team sports, each training group or class must consist

of no more than four persons including the coach, and there must be at least 1.5 metres between each four-person training group or class ;

(d) Carry out regular environmental cleaning and disinfection on the facilities at least daily;

(e) The ratio of free residual chlorine content of the pool water must meet the standard. A set of water testing kit must be provided, and the pool water must be tested at least once per day for its free residual chlorine content and the record of the test results must be kept;

(f) Leisure pool, children's pool, toddlers' pool and Jacuzzi (if available) must remain closed;

(g) Other requirements and restrictions, for example arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days, etc.

(3) For cinemas and places of public entertainment with live performance, tickets to be sold and seats to be occupied of each house for film screening/each place with live performance must not exceed 75 per cent of the seating capacity of the house/place; the total number of visitors in a theme park must not at any one time exceed 75 per cent of the overall capacity of the theme park.

(4) Seats to be occupied must not exceed 75 per cent of the seating capacity of the spectator stands of sports premises and swimming pools.

(5) Apart from the above major adjustments, during the specified period, most of the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained. Some scheduled premises can be opened when the relevant requirements and restrictions are fulfilled (including arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days). The Government is exploring that staff of scheduled premises who have completed vaccination (i.e. 14 days after receiving the second vaccine dose) would be deemed as having fulfilled the aforementioned regular testing requirement. Details will be announced in due course.

(6) Following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will continue to be closed:

(a) bathhouses;

(b) premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;

(c) establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;

(d) karaoke establishments; and

(e) mahjong-tin kau premises.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and 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.

Group gathering

(7) The scope of existing exempted group gatherings under Cap.599G (at Annex 2) will be adjusted to cover religious gatherings during which no food or drink is served (except food or drink as part of a religious ritual). The relevant arrangement will take effect on March 31 (Wednesday).

(8) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the specified period. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering business and scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

Any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such a gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such a 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 \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(9) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended during the specified period. During the aforementioned period, a person must wear a mask at all times when the person is boarding or on board a public transport carrier, is entering or present in an MTR paid area, or is entering or present in a specified public place (i.e. all public places, save for outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208)).

Under Cap. 599I, if a person does not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement, an authorised person may deny that person from boarding a public transport carrier or entering the area concerned, as well as require that person to wear a mask and disembark from the carrier or leave the said area. A person in contravention of the relevant provision commits an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). In addition, authorised public officers may issue fixed penalty notices to persons who do not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement and such persons may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000.