

Government begins to relax social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner

The Government will gazette today (August 27) 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 relax social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner. The above directions and specifications will take effect at 0.00am on August 28 for a period of seven days till September 3.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Under the new normal, the general public must accept that there would be sporadic cases and clusters in the community from time to time. We cannot and should not wait until there is no confirmed case in the community for an extended period of time before considering relaxation of social distancing measures. Subject to the epidemic situation being under control, the Government will, having regard to the latest development of the epidemic situation and risk assessment, relax social distancing measures under a refined and sophisticated approach in a gradual and orderly manner in phases so as to allow social and economic activities to resume. The first phase of relaxation would include re-opening of indoor premises for passive activities where the risk is relatively easy to manage as well as outdoor sports premises for activities involving little physical contact."

The requirements and restrictions under the latest directions and specifications (details at Annex 1) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) From 9pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, save for specific premises (details at Annex 2), 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; and close any premises, or part of the premises, on which food or drink is sold or supplied by the business for consumption on the premises. The premises concerned may still sell or supply food and/or drink for takeaway services and deliveries. A person responsible for carrying on a catering business is also required to put up a notice at the entrance to the catering premises to remind customers that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises.

(2) The number of customers at any catering premises at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises. No more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises.

(3) Tables available for use or being used by customers within any catering premises must be arranged in a way to ensure there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres or partition(s) which could serve as an effective buffer between one table and another table at the premises.

(4) Any premises (commonly known as bar or pub) that is exclusively or mainly used for the sale or supply of intoxicating liquors as defined in section 53(1) of the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109) for consumption in that premises must be closed. Any part of a catering premises that is exclusively or mainly used for the sale or supply of such intoxicating liquors for consumption in that part must be closed.

(5) Live performance and dancing must not be allowed in any catering premises. All karaoke and mahjong-tin kau activities carried on at any catering premises must also be suspended. Other requirements and restrictions in relation to catering business premises would remain in effect, including wearing a mask at all times within any catering premises except when the person is consuming food or drink; conducting body temperature screening for all persons entering the premises; and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Scheduled premises

(6) The following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F may be open subject to relevant requirements and restrictions:

(a) Cinema: The measures include that tickets to be sold and seats to be occupied of each house for film screening must not exceed 50 per cent of the seating capacity of the house; seating must be arranged in a way that no more than two consecutive seats in the same row may be occupied; no eating or drinking inside a house is allowed; and cleaning and disinfection of each house must be conducted after each screening, etc;

(b) Beauty parlour: The measures include that all staff must wear protective gears such as masks and face shield/goggles all the time when providing beauty services to customers and the protective gears have to be changed or sanitised after service is provided to a customer; the beauty parlour may only serve customers upon appointment; and no more than two persons may be allowed in each partitioned service area, etc; and

(c) Some of the outdoor sports premises for activities involving little physical contact, namely athletic tracks in sports grounds, tennis courts and tennis practice courts, golf courses, golf driving ranges and practice greens, bowling greens, shooting ranges, archery ranges, cycling parks, horse riding schools and radio-controlled model aircraft flying fields: The measures include that any person in the sports premises is required to wear a mask before and after exercise; and for a group of more than two persons, it must be arranged in a way to ensure that persons are in sub-groups of no more than two persons and there is at least 1.5 metres between each sub-group, etc.

(7) Club-house: Save for catering premises, cinema, beauty parlour and the

abovementioned outdoor sports premises in the club-house therein, all other premises/facilities must be closed. Catering premises in club-houses must operate in accordance with restrictions and directions stipulated for catering premises, including the requirement to cease dine-in services during specific periods. Cinema, beauty parlour and the abovementioned outdoor sports premises may also be open subject to compliance with the respective requirements and restrictions applicable to the premises.

(8) All scheduled premises under Cap. 599F set out below are required to suspend operation:

- (a) Amusement game centre;
- (b) Bathhouse;
- (c) Fitness centre;
- (d) Place of amusement;
- (e) Place of public entertainment (except cinema);
- (f) Premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (g) Establishment (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (h) Karaoke establishment;
- (i) Mahjong-tin kau premises;
- (j) Massage establishment; and
- (k) Swimming pools.

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

(9) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than two persons in public places will continue during the aforementioned seven-day period.

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.

Mask-wearing Requirement

(10) The Secretary for Food and Health will specify, by way of a notice published in the Gazette for the purpose of the mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I, 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). During the aforementioned seven-day period, a person must wear a mask at all times when the person is boarding or onboard a public transport carrier, is entering or present in an MTR paid area, or is entering or present in a specified public place.

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 2 (\$5,000). 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 \$2,000.

According to the World Health Organization and health experts, COVID-19 cannot be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination. The virus will co-exist with us for quite a long period of time and even become seasonally endemic. The Government is thus required to incorporate work in relation to disease prevention and control as well as infection management, in addition to the resumption of various social and economic activities and normal daily activities of members of the public, into the new normal of the daily operation of society and Government measures. To this end, the Government has all along adopted the "suppress and lift" strategy in order to quickly adjust epidemic control measures having regard to the development of the epidemic situation. The Government will continue to maintain close liaison with various trades and industries to listen to their suggestions on prevention and control measures to be adopted. The Government has also been closely monitoring the development of the epidemic situation and will allow gradual resumption of normal daily lives of members of the public under the new normal by resuming social and economic activities of which the infection risks can be considerably reduced through enhanced prevention and control measures, while striking a balance among disease prevention and control, economic needs and level of acceptance of the society.

"We hope to highlight that it has been over a month since the third wave of the epidemic started but it is not yet over. At this stage, we need the co-operation of members of the public in order to bring the epidemic under control so that social and economic activities can resume gradually. To this end, we appeal to members of the public to wear surgical masks in public places, especially when they are onboard a public transport carrier or staying in crowded places. They should also stay vigilant and maintain personal and environmental hygiene in order to prevent rebound of the epidemic," the spokesman said.