

Government continues to relax social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance in a gradual and orderly manner

The Government will gazette today (September 8) 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 continue to relax social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner. The relevant measures will take effect at 0.00am on September 11 for a period of seven days till September 17.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Taking into account the fact that local epidemic wave has continued to subside and the situation is stabilising gradually, as well as the need for the society as a whole to resume social and economic activities, we have decided to continue to relax social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner. Under the measures of this phase of relaxation, starting this Friday (September 11), we will relax the number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places from two to four; increase the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table to four in catering business premises; re-open the sports premises which have not been allowed to open under the last two phases in order to provide more opportunities for the general public to exercise to maintain physical and mental health so that they will be fit to continue to combat the epidemic; and re-open some entertainment premises where the infection risks can be considerably reduced through enhanced prevention and control measures in order to allow more social and economic activities to resume.

"With the extension of the Universal Community Testing Programme to this Friday, it can help us to identify more asymptomatic carriers in the community and cut the transmission chain of the virus therein, thereby helping to further stabilise the epidemic situation. This would thus provide us with a more reassuring basis to continue relaxation of the social distancing measures, thereby allowing early resumption of social and economic activities. Unless the epidemic situation takes a sudden downturn, the Government expects to issue new directions in the next phase to re-open catering and scheduled premises (including theme parks, exhibition venues, swimming pools, bathhouses, party rooms, bars and pubs, karaoke establishments, clubs or nightclubs, etc.) which we have not been able to re-open due to the higher infection risk involved, subject to strict compliance with appropriate infection prevention measures at the relevant premises. It is our intention to continue to allow resumption of normal daily lives of members of the public under the new normal by gradually resuming more social

and economic activities, while striking a balance among disease prevention and control, economic needs and level of acceptance of the society."

The requirements and restrictions under the latest directions and specifications (details of the arrangements for premises under Cap. 599F at Annex 1) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) From 10pm 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 four 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 activities carried on at any catering premises must also be suspended. Mahjong-tin kau playing facility provided therein must comply with the applicable restrictions and requirements. 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) Amusement game centre: The measures include that game stations, machines or facilities next to one another and less than 1.5 metres apart must not be made available for use at the same time, or that there is some form of effective partitioning; no more than four persons may be allowed at each game station, machine or facility, etc.;

(b) Fitness centre: The measures include that any person within the fitness centre is required to wear a mask at all times except when having a shower; no more than four persons may be allowed at each fitness station, machine or equipment; each group training or class must consist of no more than four persons including the coach, etc.;

(c) Place of amusement: The measures include that any person within the place of amusement is required to wear a mask at all times except when having a shower; no more than four persons may be allowed to play at each billiard table in billiard establishments or each lane in public bowling alleys; only group/private lesson is allowed at ice skating rinks, etc.;

(d) Place of public entertainment: The measures include that entertainment stations, machines or facilities next to one another and less than 1.5 metres apart must not be made available for use at the same time, or that there is some form of effective partitioning; for cinemas, 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 four consecutive seats in the same row may be occupied, no eating or drinking inside a house is allowed; for places of public entertainment for live performance, only rehearsals or virtual performances, etc. are allowed and no live audience is allowed; theme parks, places of public entertainment for exhibition (except museums) and ball pits must be closed, etc.;

(e) Beauty parlour and massage establishment: The measures include that all staff must wear protective gears such as masks and face shield/goggles at all times when providing service to customers and the protective gears have to be changed or sanitised after service is provided to a customer; customers may only be served upon appointment; no more than four persons may be allowed in each partitioned service area, etc.;

(f) Club-house: Bathhouse, party room, club or nightclub, karaoke establishment and swimming pool must be closed. Catering premises must operate in accordance with the above restrictions and requirements stipulated for catering business, including the requirement to cease dine-in services during specific periods. Amusement game centre, fitness centre, place of amusement, venue with public entertainment, beauty parlour and massage establishment, mahjong-tin kau premises as well as sports premises may also be open subject to compliance with the restrictions and requirements applicable to the relevant premises; and

(g) Sports premises: The measures include that any person (except when having a shower) is required to wear a mask (i) at all times within the indoor

sports premises, or (ii) before and after exercise within the outdoor sports premises; each group must consist of no more than four persons; there is at least 1.5 metres between each group, etc.

(7) All the following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F are required to suspend operation:

- (a) Bathhouse;
- (b) Premises (commonly known as party room) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (c) Establishment (commonly known as club or nightclub) that is open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (d) Karaoke establishment; and
- (e) Swimming pool.

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

(8) The number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places will be relaxed from two to four.

(9) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four 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, a period of seven days from September 11 till September 17. 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 (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 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. 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 spokesmen 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. As we have previously made clear, 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. To this end, the Government has been closely monitoring the development of the epidemic situation and maintaining close liaison with various trades and industries to listen to their suggestions on prevention and control measures to be adopted, and has extended the dine-in service hours for catering business premises and re-opened some of the scheduled premises during the past two weeks in phases.

"We hope to highlight that it has been almost two months since the third wave of the epidemic started but it is not yet over. The sources of a considerable proportion of additional confirmed cases also remain unknown, indicating there is still silent transmission in the community. 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 continue to maintain the awareness of epidemic prevention, particularly to stay vigilant and maintain personal and environmental hygiene, in addition to actively participate in the Universal Community Testing Programme, in order to prevent rebound of the epidemic and the hard work the entire community has put in over the past two months from going in vain."