

Government extends social distancing measures

The Government announced today (August 3) that it would gazette 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 extend the social distancing measures currently in place. The above directions and specifications will take effect at 0.00am on August 5 for a period of seven days till August 11.

The Government strongly urges the public to stay at home as much as possible, go out less often unless necessary, and avoid dining out and unnecessary social activities (including private gatherings), to fight the epidemic together without letting down one's guard, in order to reduce community transmission so as to cut the community transmission chain. Maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene at all times is key to the prevention of infection and the spread of the disease in the community, as well as to the alleviation of the enormous burden currently put on the healthcare system.

The epidemic situation of COVID-19 in Hong Kong has continued to remain severe. The recent emergence of numerous local cases of unknown infection source indicates the existence of sustained silent transmission in the community. The latest public health risk assessment shows that the risk of a large-scale community outbreak is now the highest since the emergence of the epidemic in Hong Kong.

According to the World Health Organization and health experts, 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 in order to quickly adjust epidemic control measures having regard to the development of the epidemic situation. In view of the epidemic situation which has remained severe, the Government considers it necessary to extend the relevant social distancing measures.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "In view of the latest public health risk assessment, in particular the higher risks brought about by activities conducted without wearing masks as well as various social activities as shown in recent cases, we are of the view that, at present, it is necessary to extend social distancing measures implemented under Cap. 599F, Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I, including requiring the cessation of dine-in services at catering businesses during specific periods, continuing to require closure of scheduled premises, as well as requiring any person to wear mask at all times when entering or being present in any public place."

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

Catering business

(1) From 6pm 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) On catering business, 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.

Scheduled premises

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

- (a) Amusement game centres;
- (b) Bathhouses;
- (c) Fitness centres;
- (d) Places of amusement;

- (e) Places of public entertainment;
- (f) Premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (g) Beauty parlours;
- (h) Establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (i) Karaoke establishments;
- (j) Mahjong-tin kau premises;
- (k) Massage establishments (save for those set out in Annex 3);
- (l) Sports premises; and
- (m) Swimming pools.

(7) Save for catering premises therein, all club-houses must be closed. Catering premises in club-houses must follow the directions set out for catering premises, including the requirement to cease dine-in services during specific periods.

In view of the higher infection risks involved in eating without wearing a mask, the Government calls on the persons responsible for carrying on catering business to strictly abide by the above measures and to take further measures, such as arranging single-direction seating as far as practicable to avoid face-to-face contact and refraining from table-sharing arrangements to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses, persons making available seating and tables adjacent to catering business premises 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) 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

(9) The Secretary for Food and Health will, by way of a notice published in the Gazette under Cap. 599I, continue to specify all public places so as to maintain the existing mask-wearing requirement, i.e. 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 public place (indoor or outdoor).

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.

"We will also 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," said the spokesman.