

Government extends social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government announced today (January 4) that it will 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 maintain the social distancing measures currently in place. The directions and specifications will take effect on January 7, 2021 for a period of 14 days till January 20, 2021.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong remains serious. In the past two weeks, a total of 812 cases were recorded, among which over 90 per cent were local cases. Local cases with unknown source of infection constituted around one-third of the cases. The 7-day average number of local cases was 47, while that of local cases with unknown source of infection was 15, which clearly showed that silent transmission in the community is still active.

"The Government tightened social distancing measures on December 10, 2020 and extended the measures for 14 days on December 24, 2020. Although the number of confirmed cases declined slowly in recent days, the speed of decline was clearly slower than that in the former wave of epidemic. The risk of rebound of the epidemic situation has not subsided, and large cluster outbreaks still happened from time to time. The situation is worrying. At the same time, after fighting the epidemic for months, public awareness in complying with social distancing measures has obviously declined. Despite the severe epidemic situation, there were still a large number of people on the streets during the long holidays of winter solstice, Christmas and New Year. Many people continued to attend cross-family gatherings."

"Taking into account the latest public health risk assessment, the Government will maintain existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business premises and scheduled premises, as well as the requirements for group gatherings and mask wearing. We will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic situation. There is absolutely no room for relaxing any measures at this stage. Instead, depending on the epidemic development, we would not rule out the possibility of further tightening social distancing measures."

The details of the extended requirements and restrictions are as follows:

(I) Catering business and scheduled premises

(1) The requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business and scheduled premises (details at Annex 1) will be maintained during the 14-day period from January 7, 2021 to January 20, 2021, including the following requirements: 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; no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises; bars or pubs will continue to be closed; and except club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, all scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F must be closed.

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.

(II) Group gathering

(2) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than two persons in public places will continue during the 14-day period from January 7, 2021 to January 20, 2021. 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 gathering commits an offence under the 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.

(III) Mask-wearing requirement

(3) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended for a period of 14 days from January 7, 2021 to January 20, 2021. During the aforementioned period, a person must wear a mask all the time 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.