

Government extends social distancing measures

The Government gazetted today (July 20) the directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) to extend existing social distancing measures. The above directions will take effect at 0.00am on July 22, 2020 for a period of seven days till July 28, 2020.

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 and prevent the virus from continuing to spread in the community.

The epidemic situation of COVID-19 in Hong Kong has undergone drastic changes recently. Among the 108 confirmed cases announced on July 19, 83 were local cases. New cases recorded during the period from July 13 to July 19 include 351 cases without travel history during the incubation period. The recent emergence of 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 should there be inevitable small-scale community outbreaks. In view of the continued deterioration of the epidemic situation, the Government announced yesterday a series of epidemic prevention measures, including extension of the existing social distancing measures under Cap. 599F.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The detection of quite a number of local cases with unknown sources of infection over a short period of time raises an important alarm, reminding the community that members of the public must not let down their guard in terms of epidemic prevention and control."

The spokesman added that, "In view of the latest public health risk assessment, in particular the higher risks brought about by activities conducted without wearing masks as shown in recent cases, we are of the view that it is now necessary to introduce more stringent epidemic prevention measures, and extend the social distancing measures under Cap. 599F, including imposing stringent limits on number of persons and capacity, and other infection control requirements on catering business and requiring the

closure of scheduled premises."

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

Catering business

(1) 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 four persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises.

(2) 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.

(3) 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) (intoxicating liquors) 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 intoxicating liquors for consumption in that part must be closed.

(4) 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 will be maintained.

Scheduled premises

(5) All scheduled premises 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; and
- (k) Massage establishments (save for those under Annex 3).

(6) Save for catering premises therein, all club-houses must be closed.

The directions issued on July 13 by the Secretary for Food and Health in

accordance with Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I will continue to be effective until July 28, 2020. Group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue to be prohibited. A person will continue to be required to wear a mask at all times when the person is boarding or on board a public transport carrier, or is entering or present in an MTR paid area.

"We will announce details of other epidemic prevention measures in due course. 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.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and the 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. Separately, 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. 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 who contravenes the relevant provision commits an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine at level 2 (\$5,000).