

Government further tightens social distancing measures

The Government announced today (July 27) that it would gazette amendments and directions 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 further tighten social distancing measures. The above amendments and directions will take effect at 0.00am on July 29.

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 and prevent the virus from continuing to spread in the community. Maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene at all times is key to prevention of infection and the spread of the disease in the community.

The epidemic situation of COVID-19 in Hong Kong has continued to deteriorate. New cases recorded during the period from July 20 to July 26 include 679 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 having regard to the development of the epidemic situation. In view of the continued deterioration of the epidemic situation, the Government considers it necessary to further tighten 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 it is now necessary to tighten social distancing measures implemented under Cap. 599F, Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I, including requiring the cessation of dine-in services at catering businesses, incorporating more premises into the list of scheduled premises and requiring their closure, 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) Save for specific premises (details at Annex 2), a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must, at any time, 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. Of the aforementioned specific premises, exempted catering businesses must strictly comply with limits on number of persons and capacity, and other infection control requirements, which would be reviewed by the Government from time to time and tightened where necessary.

(2) Considering the implementation situation of the requirement to cease dine-in services above at some food courts in shopping malls, the Government amends the relevant provisions under Cap. 599F, to ensure that the relevant responsible person for carrying on the catering business and manager of the premises at which the food court is situated will close the seating area adjacent to the catering business, including seats provided in a food court.

(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.

Scheduled premises

(5) Taking into account the higher risks brought about by activities conducted without wearing masks, the Government amends the relevant provisions under Cap. 599F to incorporate sports premises and swimming pools into the list of scheduled premises with effect from July 29, and will continue to require closure of all scheduled premises as below:

- (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 (new); and
- (m) Swimming pools (new).

(6) 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.

Cap. 599F permits individual catering business and scheduled premises to continue operation having regard to governmental operation or public interest such as to support anti-epidemic work where necessary.

The above measures concerning catering business and scheduled premises will take effect on July 29, for a period of seven days till August 4.

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

(7) The number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places will be tightened from four to two, with effective from July 29, 2020. Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of two persons or above in public places will continue during the seven-day period from July 29, 2020 to August 4, 2020.

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

(8) The Secretary for Food and Health will, by way of a notice published in the Gazette, further specify all public places, to extend the mask-wearing requirement to cover all outdoor public places. When the specifications take effect on July 29, 2020, 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). The relevant specifications will take effect for seven days till August 4, 2020. When the relevant specifications take effect, SFH's specifications made on July 22 will be suspended procedurally.

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.