

Government further tightens social distancing measures

In view of the development of COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong, the Government announced on November 30 to further tighten social distancing measures under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The local COVID-19 epidemic situation is serious. There have been over few hundred confirmed cases reported from the large outbreak cluster caused by group gathering activities in indoor premises. A considerable number of local cases with unknown source have indicated the existence of many silent transmission chains in the community. We need to further tighten the social distancing measures, targeting those closed, crowded, closely-contacted, and mask-off leisure and entertainment group activities."

"The Government strongly urges all members of the public to stay at home as much as possible, avoid going out unless necessary, dine out less often, reduce the frequency of all mask-off activities, and stop all unnecessary social activities, especially meal gatherings across family bubbles."

The latest details of requirements and restrictions are as follows:

(I) Catering premises and scheduled premises (details at Annex 1)

(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) no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises;

(3) All amusement game centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment (including museums, cinemas and theme parks, except performance venues), karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises and swimming pools must be closed. Bars or pubs, bath-houses, clubs or nightclubs and party rooms will continue to be closed;

(4) Persons in fitness centres or indoor sports premises must wear masks at all times (except when having a shower or drinking). No more than two persons may be allowed in each training group or class including the coach, i.e. only one-on-one classes are allowed. Spectator stands in sports premises must be closed;

(5) Persons in beauty parlours and massage establishments must wear masks at

all times (except when having facial treatments). No more than two persons may be allowed in each partitioned service area, i.e. only one-on-one services are allowed;

(6) Places of public entertainment for live performance can only be open without live audience. Also, performers must always wear masks as far as feasible; and

(7) Other requirements and restrictions on catering business and scheduled premises will be maintained, including the following requirements – the number of customers in catering premises must not exceed 50 per cent of the seating capacity; persons must not consume food or drink and must wear a mask when they are away from the table in catering premises; no live performance and dancing is allowed in catering premises and meeting rooms or function rooms of club-houses; the number of people participating in banquets in catering premises is limited to 40; catering premises and scheduled premises must display the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code obtained at the entrance of the premises or at a conspicuous position; and no more than four persons may be allowed in a guest room or a rental unit in hotels/guesthouses. Facilities involving higher health risks such as steam and sauna facilities and ball pits will continue to be closed. The relevant requirements and restrictions are also applicable to scheduled premises in club-houses.

The Government has gazetted the relevant directions and specifications under Cap.599F to implement the above measures. The above measures will take effect from December 2 for a period of 14 days till December 15, 2020. 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) Mask-wearing requirement

(8) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) will be extended for a period of 14 days from December 2 to December 15, 2020. 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 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.

(III) Group Gathering

Apart from the above measures, the Government plans to amend the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) to further tighten requirements on group gatherings. Details will be announced later.