

# Government further tightens social distancing measures

In view of the very dire epidemic situation in Hong Kong, the Government announced yesterday (February 22) further tightening of social distancing measures and its intention to maintain the relevant measures till April 20. The Government will arrange gazettal today (February 23) to extend the social distancing measures by cycles of 14 days in accordance with the public health emergency regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance, with the next cycle taking effect from February 24 to March 9.

The Government announced on February 21 the [implementation arrangements for Vaccine Pass](#), requiring all persons who enter or are present at a series of premises (including catering premises and all scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F)) to have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine with effect from February 24. Given the very dire epidemic situation in Hong Kong with the number of new cases staying high on a daily basis, the Government needs to implement Vaccine Pass and further tighten social distancing measures with a view to reducing the flow of people and containing transmission risk in the community.

The Government has amended the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) to remove engaging in any strenuous physical activity (including exercise) for the person in outdoor places, as well as eating and drinking on public transport carriers and in MTR paid areas, as reasonable excuses for not wearing a mask. The Secretary for Food and Health will also issue a specification under Cap. 599I that specified public place with mask-wearing requirement will be expanded to all areas of country parks. In other words, starting from February 24, all persons shall wear a mask in any public places (including country parks), whether or not they are engaging in physical activities; and taking masks off for eating and drinking will not be allowed on public transport carriers (including ferries/kaitos) and in MTR paid areas.

As for the scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F, the existing social distancing measures will be extended for two weeks. All closed premises will remain closed, whereas the maximum number of persons per table in catering premises will be further reduced to two. Apart from catering premises, Vaccine Pass arrangement will also be fully implemented in other scheduled premises under Cap. 599F that may still operate, including shopping malls, department stores, markets and supermarkets, etc.

Other existing measures, such as allowing no more than two persons per group gathering in a public place, prohibition of multi-household gatherings at private premises involving more than two households, mask-wearing requirement and cessation of mass events to avoid group gatherings, will continue to be implemented.

Specific measures (details of those restrictions under Cap. 599F in Annex 1) to be in force during the period from February 24 to March 9 include:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, save for specific premises (details in 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 (whichever is applicable) 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. All catering premises must implement the Vaccine Pass arrangement, under which all persons entering catering premises must comply with the vaccination requirement save under exempted situations (see details in the relevant press release on implementation arrangements for Vaccine Pass above). The maximum number of persons per table is two, and no banquet will be allowed.

(2) No live performance and dancing activity is allowed in catering premises. Karaoke or mahjong-tin kau activity should also be suspended therein.

(3) Other requirements and restrictions on catering premises will remain in force, including that all customers, when they are away from the table, must not consume food or drink and must wear a mask, and they must scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones/other mobile devices before entering the premises (excluding persons who only order takeaway).

(4) Bars or pubs will be closed.

(II) Scheduled premises

(5) Except for club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, all scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F as listed below must 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;
- (l) Sports premises;
- (m) Swimming pools;
- (n) Cruise ships (i.e. suspension of "cruise-to-nowhere" itineraries);
- (o) Event premises (except for wedding ceremonies subject to a headcount limit);
- (p) Barber shops or hair salons; and
- (q) Religious premises (except for funerals, or wedding ceremonies subject to a headcount limit).

(6) For club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, including implementation of the Vaccine Pass, closing the facilities therein that are being used or operated as premises mentioned in points (4) and (5) above, and the catering premises therein must comply with all applicable requirements, including that of suspension of dine-in service during dinnertime.

(7) For shopping malls, department stores, supermarkets and markets, the manager/person-in-charge must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, including fulfilling the relevant requirements on "LeaveHomeSafe" and Vaccine Pass under "passive checking".

### (III) Mask-wearing requirement

(8) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended during the period from February 24 to March 9. 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 including outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208)).

(9) 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 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 at \$5,000.

### (IV) Cessation of mass events to avoid group gatherings

(10) Unless exempted, group gatherings of more than two persons in public places will be prohibited during the period from February 24 to March 9. 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.

(11) From February 24 to March 9, multi-household gatherings at private premises involving more than two households will be prohibited.

(12) 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 Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Gathering) Regulation (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 at \$5,000.

A Government spokesperson said, "The fifth wave of the epidemic has brought tremendous challenge to Hong Kong. It is now the top priority for all sectors of the community to make efforts to fight the epidemic. We hope that citizens may co-operate with us to contain the epidemic as soon as possible so as to protect public health and allow daily lives to gradually resume normalcy."