

Government maintains existing social distancing measures

The Government announced today (January 31) the gazettal of extension of existing social distancing measures for 14 days from February 4 till February 17.

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In view of the severe epidemic situation, the Chief Executive announced on January 27 the extension of the current set of social distancing measures for two weeks. This arrangement aims to reduce public traffic in the community to prevent a mass outbreak.

"Hong Kong has been continuously recording cases with unknown sources, and samples collected in various districts under sewage surveillance for the COVID-19 virus have tested positive. This shows the existence of silent transmission chains in the community. Although the Chinese New Year is a traditional festival for celebration among relatives and friends, we hope that citizens may stay at home as far as possible and avoid gatherings among families in order to protect public health," a Government spokesman said.

Relevant measures will apply to all catering business and scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). Specific measures (details in Annex 1) include:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, save for specific premises (details in Annex 3), 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. The maximum numbers of persons per table for catering premises under Types B, C and D Modes of Operation are two, four and six respectively; the maximum numbers of customers per catering premises are 50 per cent, 75 per cent and 100 per cent of the capacity limit of the premises; and the maximum numbers of attendees per banquet are 20, 20 and 240 respectively.

(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); and
- (o) event premises (except for wedding ceremonies or specified business meetings subject to a headcount limit).

(6) For club houses and hotels or guesthouses, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, including 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.

(III) Mask-wearing requirement

(7) 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 February 4 to February 17. 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)).

(8) 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 at \$5,000.

(IV) Cessation of mass events to avoid group gatherings

(9) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the 14-day period from February 4 to February 17. 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.

(10) 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 Group 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.

"Boosting the vaccination rate is crucial for Hong Kong to build a barrier against the epidemic, and will create favourable conditions for relaxing anti-epidemic measures in future. The Government announced earlier that it will substantially expand the 'vaccine bubble', now renamed as the 'vaccine pass', on February 24. Staff members of the relevant premises will be required to have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while the customers and users of premises where they are required to have received vaccination for entry will be required to have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The details will be announced later. We urge citizens to get vaccinated as soon as possible to fight against the new wave of the epidemic together," the spokesman said.