

Government maintains most social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

â€‹The Government will gazette the extension of most existing social distancing measures for 14 days till December 8.

"Amid the severe pandemic situation across the world, the Government strives to maintain the anti-epidemic strategy of guarding against the importation of cases and the resurgence of domestic infections with the target of zero infection to protect public health and foster favourable conditions for resuming cross-boundary travel with the Mainland and cross-border travel in future. To this end, we need to maintain most of the social distancing measures currently in place. Meanwhile, subject to stable epidemic situation, in view of the increasingly smooth operation of the 'cruise-to-nowhere' itineraries and the set of stringent health control safeguards adopted by the cruise lines, starting from December 1, the current passenger capacity limit of cruise ships at 50 per cent of the normal capacity will be adjusted to 75 per cent of the normal capacity," a spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said today (November 23).

In addition, in order to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of exposure risk tracing and testing upon identification of a confirmed case as a way to tackle the more transmissible variant strains and to enhance the epidemic control capacity to protect members of the public, starting from December 9 (i.e. the commencement of the cycle of social distancing measures following the next), the requirement to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" (LHS) mobile application will be extended to all premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). This means that all customers or users must first scan the LHS venue QR code using the LHS mobile application before entering the premises. The social distancing measures of that round will be updated to include the relevant requirements.

"We will closely liaise with the relevant trades in the coming two weeks to ensure the smooth implementation of the relevant measures. We appeal to the public to co-operate and comply with the relevant requirements in order to further enhance the anti-epidemic capacity of Hong Kong," the spokesman added.

The spokesman said that vaccination is a crucial part of the local anti-epidemic strategy. The Government will continue to review and implement additional measures to increase the overall vaccination rate, including the possibility of extending the scope of a "vaccine bubble", and closely monitor the vaccination enhancement measures adopted in the Mainland and overseas.

The Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines are highly effective in preventing

severe cases and death from COVID-19. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. The Government continues to call on persons who are not yet vaccinated, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a much higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, to get vaccinated as early as possible for better self-protection and preparation of cross-boundary travel.

According to 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), the details of the requirements and restrictions which will take effect from November 25 till December 8 (the specified period) are as follows (see Annex 1 for requirements and restrictions under Cap. 599F):

Catering business

(1) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the catering business will be maintained during the specified period. Except for bars or pubs which are subject to other requirements, all catering businesses must operate according to one of the operating modes among Types A, B, C and D Mode of Operation, with details in Annex 2.

Bars and pubs

(2) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to bars and pubs will be maintained during the specified period, with details in Annex 2.

Scheduled premises

(3) During the specified period, the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained. They can operate according to the specified Mode of Operation if specified measures are adopted (details in Annex 1 and Annex 2). Otherwise, they should continue to be closed:

- (a) bathhouses;
- (b) premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (c) establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking and dancing or other entertainment;
- (d) karaoke establishments;
- (e) mahjong-tin kau premises; and
- (f) cruise ships.

(4) Starting from December 1, the passenger capacity limit of cruise ships will be adjusted to 75 per cent of the normal capacity.

(5) During the specified period, the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to other scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained. These scheduled premises can be opened when the relevant requirements and restrictions are fulfilled (including the persons responsible for carrying on

the premises arranging for all staff members involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days, the samples of which must be taken through combined nasal and throat swabs and by professionals, or to complete a COVID-19 vaccination course as an alternative).

(6) 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. In addition, persons who are present at any premises of a catering business or any scheduled premises have to comply with directions applicable to them. Non-compliance with the relevant directions would be an offence and offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000. The liability may be discharged by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000. In particular, a staff member or a customer who makes false declarations or provides false information under the relevant measures would be regarded as non-compliant with the directions issued under Cap. 599F and would be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. Any contravention against group gathering requirements within a premises under Cap. 599F would continue to be handled according to the requirements under Cap. 599G, which means that participants of the group gathering would be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

Group gathering

(7) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the specified period. 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.

(8) According to Cap. 599G, any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; or owns, controls or operates the place of such a gathering and knowingly allows the taking place of such a gathering commits an offence. 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 \$5,000. Any participant, staff member or customer who makes false declarations or provides false information under the relevant measures may be regarded as participating in a prohibited group gathering and subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(9) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended during the specified period. A person must wear a mask at all times 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)).

(10) 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 of \$5,000.