

Government relaxes certain social distancing measures

In view of the latest epidemic development and the need to contain relevant risks, the Government announced today (September 30) the relaxation of certain social distancing measures with effect from October 6.

The COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong has recently subsided. The number of daily new cases has seen a decrease, from more than 11 000 in early September to hovering between 3 000 and some 4 000 in recent days, showing that the epidemic situation has gradually stabilised. On the premise of containing transmission risk, the Government decided to relax certain social distancing measures in the next 14-day cycle to enable more social and economic activities, with a view to striking a balance between transmission risk and economic vitality.

Relevant measures concern catering premises and scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). They include increasing the maximum number of persons per table for catering premises from 8 to 12; relaxing the restriction on all activities in scheduled premises with a limit on the number of persons per group from 8 to 12; relaxing the maximum number of persons per table for bars/pubs and clubs/nightclubs from 4 to 6; increasing the maximum number of persons for banquets in catering premises from 120 to 240; and lifting the suspension mechanism for cruise-to-nowhere itineraries.

Other social distancing measures will remain unchanged, including the requirement for participants in banquets as well as patrons of bars/pubs and clubs/nightclubs to undergo rapid antigen test (RAT); requirements related to the use of "LeaveHomeSafe" and the Vaccine Pass, and restrictions for holders of Red Code/Amber Code in entering premises; mask-wearing for citizens on transport carriers and in specified public places; as well as prohibition of group gatherings in public places etc.

The Government reminded citizens in particular that the applicable age of the [Vaccine Pass](#) has been lowered to 5 with effect from today. Children aged 5 to 11 are required to comply with the specified vaccination requirements under the Vaccine Pass when entering any applicable premises of the Vaccine Pass, namely having received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, or within three months after receiving the first dose of vaccine. As for persons aged 12 or above, the grace period for receiving the third dose after the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine has been shortened from six months to five months under the Vaccine Pass.

To facilitate the aforementioned new arrangement of the Vaccine Pass, a new function has been added to the "LeaveHomeSafe". After users have updated the application, they may store their own Vaccine Pass and those of a maximum

of eight accompanied persons at the same time. Children or their family members may also bring along and present a paper record printed with the QR code of their vaccination record, or present a photo of the QR code saved in a mobile phone for the purpose of using it as the Vaccine Pass. The Government reminded persons-in-charge of premises that carrying or presenting the Vaccine Pass QR code by the aforementioned means are allowed under the Vaccine Pass arrangement.

The Government will closely monitor the epidemic development in a holistic manner, and review the room for relaxing the social distancing measures under each 14-day cycle ahead, with a view to further resuming citizens' daily lives to normalcy when the epidemic continues to stabilise.

Specific measures (see details of the restrictions under Cap. 599F in Annex 1) to be in force during the period from October 6 to October 19 include:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 0.00am to 4.59am every day, save for specific premises (see Annex 2), a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must continue to 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 patrons that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises. All patrons who enter the catering premises for attending banquets or enter the bar/pub zone therein must present proof of a negative RAT result obtained within 24 hours or a negative PCR test result obtained within 48 hours. Otherwise, they should be denied entry. The maximum number of persons per table for catering premises will be 12, and banquet activities with no more than 240 persons each will be allowed. Live performance and dancing activity will remain prohibited therein.

(2) Bars/pubs may open every day from 5am to 1.59am of the subsequent day with a maximum number of 6 persons per table and the total number of patrons capped at 75 per cent of their capacity. Live performance and dancing activity will remain prohibited therein. All patrons of bars/pubs must continue to present proof of a negative RAT result obtained within 24 hours or a negative PCR test result obtained within 48 hours before entering the relevant premises. Otherwise, they should be denied entry.

(3) Other requirements and restrictions on catering premises and bars/pubs will continue to remain in force, including that all patrons, 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). Operators

of catering premises and bars/pubs are required to use the latest "QR Code Verification Scanner" mobile application provided by the Government to scan the QR code of a patron's vaccination record, medical exemption certificate or recovery record.

(II) Scheduled premises

(4) For swimming pools, sports premises, fitness centres, beauty parlours and massage establishments, places of public entertainment, places of amusement, amusement game centres, event premises, religious premises, barber shops/hair salons, bathhouses, party rooms, clubs/nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises and cruise ships, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F. In particular, the maximum number of persons per group will be increased to 12 in general. All staff members involved in the operation of scheduled premises must conduct a RAT once every three days before entering the premises. The maximum number of persons per table for clubs/nightclubs will be 6 while live performance and dancing activity remain prohibited therein, and their patrons should continue to be denied entry unless they can present proof of a negative RAT result obtained within 24 hours or a negative PCR test result obtained within 48 hours before entering the relevant premises. Staff members and patrons alike must wear a mask at all times save for exempted circumstances. Citizens are allowed not to wear masks when they are exercising in sports premises as well as fitness centres which meet the requirement on air change.

(5) For club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, managers must continue to comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, and the catering premises, bars/pubs and scheduled premises therein must comply with all applicable requirements.

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

(7) The restriction on the number of persons allowed in premises such as cinemas, performance venues, museums, event premises and religious premises etc. will remain at 85 per cent of their capacity. Patrons may eat and drink in cinema houses.

(III) 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. 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. Citizens are allowed not to wear masks if they are present in outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208), or are conducting strenuous physical activity (e.g. exercising or jogging) in outdoor public places.

(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) Group gatherings

(10) Unless exempted, group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will remain prohibited. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering premises, bars/pubs and scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

(11) Subject to relevant requirements, local group tours with no more than 30 persons may continue to be conducted. The relevant requirements include (i) relevant staff have received three doses of vaccine, and conducted an RAT on the same day before the commencement of local group tour activities, and (ii) all tour participants have fulfilled the prevailing Vaccine Pass requirements. If all tour participants have conducted an RAT on the same day of the tour before the commencement of local group tour activities, the relevant restriction on the number of participants will be relaxed to 100 persons.

(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 a 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 spokesman said, "The Government will adopt a prudent and stable approach in relaxing various anti-epidemic measures, so as to avoid a rebound of the epidemic situation and backtracking along the path to normalcy as far as practicable."

"On the other hand, local seasonal influenza activity has remained at a low level since February 2020 and Hong Kong citizens now have a weaker overall immunity against influenza. Research shows that contracting influenza and COVID-19 at the same time may result in a higher risk of more serious complications or even death."

"The Scientific Committees under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) reached a consensus in August this year that

COVID-19 vaccine can be administered at the same time with seasonal influenza vaccine (SIV). Various venues, including the designated facilities of the Hospital Authority and the DH, will support co-administration of COVID-19 vaccine and SIV for eligible persons in order to offer greater convenience to citizens. Community Vaccination Centres in various districts will allow Hong Kong residents aged 50 or above to choose to receive a free SIV concurrently when they are there for COVID-19 vaccination starting from October 6. They may now make reservation through the [booking system of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme](#)."

"As winter is approaching in Hong Kong, we urge citizens to receive COVID-19 vaccine and SIV as early as possible in order to protect themselves and their family members, joining our efforts in maintaining the operation of the local healthcare system."