

Government relaxes social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government will gazette today (June 16) directions and amendments under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) to extend the social distancing measures in relation to catering businesses, scheduled premises and group gatherings in public places, as well as make appropriate adjustments and relaxations having regard to the latest situation. The measures will come into effect on June 19, 2020 for a period of 14 days till July 2, 2020.

The World Health Organization and health experts advised that the COVID-19 would not be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination. The Government thus is required to incorporate work in relation to disease prevention and control as well as infection management into the new normal of the daily operation of the society. To this end, the Government has all along adopted the "suppress and lift" strategy and strived to strike a balance among public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance, maintaining the various disease prevention measures while allowing room for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities of the society when the situation permits.

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau said, "As repeatedly emphasised over the past few weeks, we are currently at the 'lifting' phase under our 'suppress and lift' disease prevention strategy. Having regard to the latest public health risk, the Government is of the view that this is an appropriate time to relax the existing social distancing measures to send a clear signal to different sectors of the society that social and economic activities may further resume subject to fulfilment of relevant infection control measures, so as to facilitate the recovery of the local economy."

Following the directions and amendments under Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G, the latest relaxed social distancing measures will be as follows –

Group gatherings (Cap. 599G)

(1) The number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places will be relaxed from eight to 50. Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings at public places will continue during the abovementioned 14 days.

(2) Group gatherings at catering business premises (such as banquets at those premises) would be exempted from the restriction on the number of persons at group gatherings under Cap. 599G. This relaxation has taken into account the fact that all catering businesses and scheduled premises subject to Cap. 599F

are required to follow a series of infection control requirements and restrictions, and that group gatherings at scheduled premises have been exempted from the restriction on the number of persons at group gatherings under Cap. 599G since May 8.

(3) Having regard to the latest limit on the number of persons at group gatherings, corresponding adjustments will be made to the exempted group gatherings under Cap. 599G.

Catering businesses and scheduled premises (Cap. 599F)

(4) On catering businesses, other than the relaxation measure mentioned in item (2) above, the limit on the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table will be removed while the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table in bars/pubs will be increased from four to eight. Other requirements and restrictions on catering business premises will be maintained.

(5) On scheduled premises, the limit on the number of persons at each facility/group/room at these premises will be increased from eight to 16 persons, and the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table in clubs or nightclubs will be increased from four to eight. Other requirements and restrictions on scheduled premises will be maintained and enhanced based on practical situations.

(6) Live performance and dancing will be allowed to resume at catering business and scheduled premises, but persons working at the premises and performers must wear masks all the time except when there is some form of partition or adequate distancing which could serve as effective buffer between such persons/performers and customers (or for places of public entertainment, some form of partition or adequate distancing which could serve as effective buffer between such persons/performers and customers/the audience).

Details are at Annex.

"The Government will review the various measures in place from time to time in accordance with the development of the epidemic situation, and will make suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors," said the spokesman.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and the 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.

Separately, any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such gathering, commits an offence under 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 of \$2,000.