

# Government tightens infection control measures for fitness centres

The Government announced that it has gazetted the directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) to tighten infection control measures in fitness centres. The directions took effect from 0.00am on March 12, 2021 for a period of six days till March 17, 2021.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "In view of the recent large-scale cluster outbreak in fitness centres, we need to tighten the infection control measures in fitness centres with immediate effect, in particular reinstating the mask-on requirement, in order to contain the epidemic. In all circumstances, particularly in an indoor setting, not wearing a mask is a high-risk behaviour and is prone to infection or transmission of COVID-19."

"The first case of this cluster was detected through regular testing required under Cap. 599F. Many of the confirmed cases in this cluster were in good health condition all along and did not show any symptoms when they were confirmed positive to COVID-19. This demonstrates that in order to break the transmission chain in the community successfully, high-risk groups such as staff of fitness centres and other scheduled premises who have frequent contact with others should undergo regular testing."

"In addition, the Government announced on March 8 that all staff of scheduled premises under Cap. 599F (including staff of fitness centres) were included as a vaccination priority group under the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. We call on all staff to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and others. A higher proportion of persons receiving vaccination in the community will strengthen the control of the epidemic situation, thus creating the conditions for relaxing social distancing measures."

According to the latest directions under Cap. 599F, any person within a fitness centre is required to wear a mask at all times, except when having a shower or consuming food/drink at a table in catering premises. Other requirements currently applicable to fitness centres remain unchanged as follows:

1. No more than four persons per fitness station, machine or equipment;
2. Clean and disinfect fitness stations, machines or equipment before and after each use;
3. Adequate distance (i.e. there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres between the two) or effective partition (i.e. there is some form of partition which could serve as effective buffer between the two) between fitness stations, machines or equipment;
4. Adequate distance or effective partition between groups/classes;

5. No more than four persons per training group or class. If the training group or class has more than four persons, at least 1.5 metres of social distancing should be maintained between every participant;
6. Fitness centres should arrange for all staff to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days, and ensure that the staff keep records of every SMS notification containing the result of the test for 31 days;
7. Fitness centres should ensure that users scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before the persons are allowed to enter the fitness centres; and
8. Other requirements and restrictions, including body temperature screening on persons before entering fitness centres and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Managers of fitness centres 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.

"We appeal to fitness centres to strictly comply with the requirements, including arranging for their staff to undergo testing once every 14 days. The appointment rate of the city's 19 community testing centres for the next seven days is only about 30 per cent. Staff of fitness centres can make an appointment for free testing at any community testing centre."

"The Government will closely monitor the epidemic development and the compliance situation of infection control measures by fitness centres. If necessary, we would not exclude the possibility of adopting more stringent measures, including requiring staff of fitness centres to undergo testing at a more frequent interval, or requiring the closure of all fitness centres, in order to contain the epidemic."