

Government tightens social distancing measures

In view of the development of COVID-19 in Hong Kong, the Government announced today (November 14) that social distancing measures will be tightened.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "With the relaxation of social distancing measures, members of the public appeared to become less alert in combating the epidemic, and we have seen anti-epidemic fatigue in the community with an increase in mask-off social gatherings. At the same time, the global epidemic situation has continued to worsen, and there are signs of rebound in local confirmed cases with unknown source of infection recently. The fourth wave of outbreak could be triggered at any moment."

"The Government has to adopt a 'preventing the importation of cases and the spreading of the virus in the community' infection control strategy to curb the epidemic. On prevention of importation of cases, we have extensively tightened testing and quarantine requirements for inbound travellers and exempted persons since July. The Secretary for Food and Health also announced further tightening measures on November 13 and today."

"At the same time, the Government needs to prevent spreading of the virus in the community by swiftly tightening infection control measures, targeting at risks brought about by mask-off gathering activities in particular. In view of the latest public health risk assessment, in particular the higher risks brought about by staycation as shown in recent cases, we consider it necessary to tighten social distancing measures under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), targeting at mask-off gathering activities, including gatherings in hotels (the so-called staycation). We will also tighten the visiting arrangement for confinees under hotel quarantine, with a view to stopping the transmission of virus by imported cases in the community."

The latest details of requirements and restrictions are as follows:

(I) Catering premises and scheduled premises (details at Annex 1)

(1) From 12.00am to 4.59am daily, save for specific premises (details at Annex 2), 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, 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;

(2) No more than two persons may be seated together at one table within bars or pubs as well as clubs or nightclubs; no more than four persons may be seated together at one table within other catering business premises;

(3) Members of public must only consume food or drink at the table (but not any other places) within catering business premises. In other words, a person must not consume food or drink and must wear a mask when he or she is away from the table (such as toasting at weddings);

(4) The total number of people allowed in catering business premises (including bars or pubs), clubs or nightclubs, and swimming pools will be capped at 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity/maximum capacity of the respective premises;

(5) Members of the public must wear masks when doing exercise in indoor sports premises and public skating rinks, except when there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres or effective partition(s), or when doing certain exercises involving little physical contact;

(6) Other requirements and restrictions on catering business and scheduled premises will be maintained. Amongst others, facilities involving higher health risks such as steam and sauna facilities and ball pits will continue to be prohibited from opening; and

(7) The Government will explore to incorporate hotels /guesthouses into the list of scheduled premises, and requirements will be imposed to this newly added scheduled premises, including:

- limiting the number of guests in each guestroom to four persons (except people living in the same household);
- requiring all guests visiting guestrooms to register their personal particulars with the hotel/guesthouse operator;
- conducting body temperature screening on a person before the person is allowed to enter the hotel/guesthouse;
- conducting cleaning and disinfection of facilities and accessories before the use of the next customer;
- providing hand sanitisers at the hotel/guesthouse for any person therein;
- ensuring the guestrooms for hotel confinees and non-confinees must be separated in different floors; and
- hotel operators must take effective measures to prevent hotel confinees from leaving their guestrooms.

The Government has gazetted the directions and specification under Cap. 599F to implement the above measures in (1) to (6). The above measures will take effect from November 16 for a period of 11 days till November 26, 2020. The Government has also started preparing for the legislative amendment work related to the above new requirements set out in (7).

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.

(II) Tightening the visiting arrangement for persons under quarantine in hotels

(8) The Department of Health (DH) will shortly disallow visitors for any person under compulsory quarantine in hotels during the quarantine period. If confinees have the need to replenish goods or food, their friends, family members or hotel staff can place them outside the guestrooms for the confinees to pick up without face-to-face contact. If a person under compulsory hotel quarantine requires the company of a carer, with the prior permission from DH, the carer also has to be quarantined in the hotel till the end of the quarantine period. The above measures will take effect from November 18, 2020.

The Government strongly appeals to the confinees to follow the quarantine requirement strictly in order to protect the health of their own selves and others. The measure is of utmost importance to prevent the spreading of COVID-19 in the community. Breaking Quarantine Orders is a criminal offence and offenders are subject to a maximum imprisonment of six months and a fine of \$25,000.

(III) Group gatherings

(9) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the 11-day period from November 16 to 26, 2020.

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 of \$2,000.

(IV) Mask-wearing requirement

(10) 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 eleven days from November 16 to November 26, 2020. During the aforementioned period, 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)).

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 2 (\$5,000). 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 \$2,000.

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