

Government tightens social distancing measures in view of latest epidemic situation

In view of the development of COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong, the Government announces today (January 5) that it will tighten social distancing measures with effect from January 7 for a period of 14 days to January 20.

"The COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong has evolved drastically on the previous day. The virus has spread into the local community due to several imported cases concerning exempted air crew members, and silent transmission chains may have already existed in the community. Hong Kong now faces substantial risk of a major outbreak. The Government must adopt stringent measures in the coming two weeks with a view to containing the epidemic as early as possible," a Government spokesman said.

The Government will tighten social distancing measures to the most stringent level as seen during the third and fourth waves of the epidemic, with a view to reducing public traffic, social functions and crowd gatherings to the greatest extent. This serves to curb the spread of the virus in the community through discouraging members of the public from going out and joining activities unnecessarily. Relevant measures will apply to all catering business and scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F). Specific measures (details at Annex 1) include:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, save for specific premises (details at Annex 3), 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 (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 customers that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises. Maximum number of persons per table for catering premises under Types B, C and D Modes of Operation will be reduced to two, four and six respectively, whereas the maximum number of customers per premises and per banquet will remain unchanged.

(2) No live performance and dancing activity is allowed in catering premises. Karaoke or mahjong-tin kau activity should also be suspended therein.

(3) Other requirements and restrictions on catering premises will remain in force, including that all customers, when they are away from the table, must not consume food or drink and must wear a mask; and they must scan the LeaveHomeSafe (LHS) venue QR code using the LHS mobile application on their mobile phones / other mobile devices before entering the premises (excluding persons who only order takeaways).

(4) Bars or pubs will be closed.

(II) Scheduled premises

(5) Except club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, all scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F as listed below must suspend operation:

- (a) Amusement game centres;
- (b) Bathhouses;
- (c) Fitness centres;
- (d) Places of amusement;
- (e) Places of public entertainment;
- (f) Premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (g) Beauty parlours;
- (h) Establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (i) Karaoke establishments;
- (j) Mahjong-tin kau premises;
- (k) Massage establishments;
- (l) Sports premises;
- (m) Swimming pools;
- (n) cruise ships (i.e. suspension of "cruise-to-nowhere" itineraries); and
- (o) event premises.

(6) For club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, including closing the facilities therein that are being used or operated as premises mentioned in points (4) and (5) above; and the catering premises therein must comply with all applicable requirements, including that of suspension of dine-in service during dinnertime.

(III) Mask-wearing requirement

(7) 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 14 days from January 7 to January 20. 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)).

(8) 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 at \$5,000.

(IV) Cessation of mass events to avoid group gatherings

(9) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the 14-day period from January 7 to January 20. 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.

(10) 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 at \$5,000.

(11) All local tours will be suspended.

The Government will review the above social distancing measures after around seven days on whether they have effectively reduced gathering activities of the general public and thereby containing the epidemic, and consider making suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors.

"With the co-operation of the general public, including observing the above social distancing measures, conducting tests in accordance with Compulsory Testing Notices and receiving vaccination as soon as possible, we hope that the epidemic may be contained before the Lunar New Year so as to allow the general public to enjoy the festive season in a safer environment", the spokesman said.