

Government to further relax social distancing measures under “vaccine bubble”

The Government will gazette directions and specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) to further relax social distancing measures on conditions with "vaccine bubble" as the basis. The above directions and specifications will take effect from 0.00am on June 24, for a period of 14 days till July 7 (the specified period).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, “The local epidemic situation has become stable, and the vaccination rate is increasing steadily. We consider it an opportune time to introduce the second-phase measures under the ‘vaccine bubble’, with a view to responding to the aspirations of various trades and the public to resume normal daily lives as soon as possible”

“Taking into account international experiences, relaxation of social distancing measures across the board can easily lead to rebound of the epidemic situation. ‘Vaccine bubble’ is an international trend and supported with scientific grounds. We hope the public will receive vaccination as soon as possible to allow Hong Kong to return to normality.”

The details of the latest requirements and restrictions during the specified period (see Annex 1 for requirements and restrictions under Cap. 599F) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) The requirements and restrictions for Types C and D Mode of Operation are relaxed as follows:

(a) Type C Mode of Operation: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal seating capacity of the premises; and

(b) Type D Mode of Operation: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal seating capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to 12 persons. The vaccination requirements for customers will be relaxed to two-thirds of the persons at the same table having received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Regarding banquets, there should be at least two-thirds of the participants who have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and the maximum number of participants will be increased to 180. Live performance is allowed within the premises, provided that the performers have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and adopted the relevant infection control

measures, including wearing masks during performance.

(2) Other existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business will be maintained, including Types A and B Mode of Operation, with details in Annex 2.

Bars and pubs

(3) Provided that all staff have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, bars and pubs can operate under Type 1 Mode of Operation. The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal seating capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to four persons. The opening hours remain the same.

(4) If all staff have been fully vaccinated (which generally refers to having received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine plus 14 days), bars and pubs can operate under Type 2 Mode of Operation. The premises may operate every day from 5am to 3.59am on the subsequent day. The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal seating capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to eight persons.

(5) Live performance is allowed within the premises, provided that the performers have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and adopted the relevant infection control measures, including wearing masks during performance.

(6) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to bars and pubs will be maintained, including the requirement that all customers must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination. Details are in Annex 2.

Scheduled premises

(7) Provided that all staff have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, the following scheduled premises under Cap.599F can operate under Type 1 Mode of Operation. The relevant requirements and restrictions are relaxed as follows:

(a) party rooms: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal capacity of the premises;

(b) clubs or nightclubs: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to four persons. Live performance is allowed within the premises, provided that the performers have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and adopted the relevant infection control measures, including wearing masks during performance;

(c) karaoke establishments: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to eight persons; and

(d) mahjong-tin kau premises: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 75% of the normal capacity of the premises.

(8) If all staff have been fully vaccinated, the following scheduled premises

under Cap. 599F can operate under Type 2 Mode of Operation. The relevant requirements and restrictions are further relaxed as follows:

(a) party rooms: The premises may operate every day from 5am to 3.59am on the subsequent day. The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers in the same room will be increased to 12 persons;

(b) clubs or nightclubs: The premises may operate every day from 5am to 3.59am on the subsequent day. The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to eight persons;

(c) karaoke establishments: The premises may operate every day from 5am to 3.59am on the subsequent day. The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal capacity of the premises, and the maximum number of customers at the same table will be increased to 12 persons; and

(d) mahjong-tin kau premises: The maximum number of customers will be relaxed to 100% of the normal capacity of the premises.

(9) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the four types of scheduled premises stated above will be maintained, including the requirement that all customers must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination.

(10) All participants of a training group in a fitness centre can be exempted from wearing masks during exercise if all persons in the room (including staff who work therein, coaches and students) have been fully vaccinated and that adequate distance are maintained between participants. If the coach of the training group is unfit to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of health reasons, he or she must receive regular testing and wear a mask.

(11) The maximum number of persons allowed in swimming pools will be relaxed to 50% of capacity. For individual swimming pools where all staff and customers have been fully vaccinated, the maximum number of persons allowed will be relaxed to 100% of capacity.

(12) Fully vaccinated performers in theme parks can be exempted from wearing masks while performing outdoors.

(13) The above relaxation measures are also applicable to relevant facilities in exhibition centres, hotels and private clubhouses.

(14) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to other scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained. These scheduled premises can be opened when the relevant requirements and restrictions are complied with (including arranging for all staff members involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days, or complete a COVID-19 vaccination course as an alternative).

(15) 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. In addition, persons who are

present at any premises of a catering business or any scheduled premises have to comply with directions applicable to them. Non-compliance with the relevant directions would be an offence and offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000. The liability may be discharged by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000. In particular, a staff member or a customer who makes false declarations or provides false information under the relevant measures would be regarded as non-compliance with the directions issued under Cap. 599F and would be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000. Any contravention against group gathering requirements within a premises under Cap. 599F would be handled according to the requirements under Cap. 599G, which means that participants of the group gathering would be subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

Group gathering

(16) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the specified period. 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.

(17) The Government will seek approval of the Executive Council on the amendments to Cap. 599G to adjust the scope of existing exempted group gatherings under Cap. 599G (details in Annex 4) in accordance with the arrangements as stated in items (18) and (19) below.

(18) Group gatherings of not more than 100 persons each during tours organised by licensed travel agents and registered with the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong are allowed, on condition that two-thirds of the participants of the group gathering must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. If such condition could not be met, the current limit of 30 persons will continue to apply. Other requirements remain the same, including that the frontline staff of such group tours must have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Frontline staff who are unfit to receive vaccination because of health reasons must submit a declaration form and present a medical certificate to the licensee operating the tour and undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 using combined nasal and throat swabs within seven days prior to receiving the relevant group tours.

(19) Certain mask-on group gatherings are relaxed, including wedding ceremonies and religious gatherings where no food or drink is served (except as part of religious ritual), as well as business meetings held in order to comply with any Ordinance or other regulatory instrument such as annual general meetings. If two-thirds of the participants of the gathering have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, the maximum number of participants allowed will be relaxed to 100% of the normal capacity of the premises. Otherwise, the maximum number of participants allowed will be relaxed to 50% of the normal capacity of the premises

(20) 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 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 \$5,000. A staff member or a customer who makes false declarations or provides false information under the relevant measures may be regarded as participating in a prohibited group gathering and subject to a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(21) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended during the specified period. A person must wear a mask at all times 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)).

(22) 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 of \$5,000.