

Government to maintain most of the social distancing measures

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 maintain most of the social distancing measures currently in place. The above directions and specifications will take effect from 0.00am on July 8, for a period of 14 days till July 21 (the specified period).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The Government introduced the second-phase relaxation measures under the 'vaccine bubble' on June 24 with a view to responding to the aspirations of various trades and the public. Having observed the implementation of the second-phase measures, the Government will maintain most of the social distancing measures currently in place while refining the measures applicable to places of amusement, places of public entertainment, sports premises and swimming pools.

"The local epidemic situation has become stable, but the threat brought by mutant strains to the global epidemic situation cannot be neglected. If the vaccination rate in Hong Kong can be raised sooner to achieve herd immunity, the social distancing measures can be further relaxed to allow Hong Kong to return to normality as soon as possible. We call on the public again to receive vaccination as early as possible."

The spokesman cautioned that, to fulfil the requirement of performing due diligence checks to ensure customers have complied with the relevant requirement about COVID-19 vaccination in order to enter the relevant premises/designated zones, premises operators must use the "QR Code Verification Scanner" mobile application provided by the Government to scan the customers' QR code of local COVID-19 vaccination record. The Government does not accept other means of checking the local vaccination record, such as using other scanners or visual inspection. Customers who received COVID-19 vaccines in places outside Hong Kong must make a declaration to the relevant premises operator using the specified form.

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 existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business will be maintained during the specified period. Except for bars or pubs which are subject to other requirements, all catering business must operate according to one operating mode among Types A, B, C and D Mode of

Operation, with details in Annex 2.

Bars and pubs

(2) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to bars and pubs will be maintained during the specified period, with details in Annex 2.

Scheduled premises

(3) For public skating rinks, individual users not participating in training groups or classes may be allowed under the following circumstances:

- (a) if all staff have been fully vaccinated (which generally refers to having received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine plus 14 days), the number of persons allowed within the premises will be 50% of its normal capacity; or
- (b) if all staff and customers have been fully vaccinated, the maximum number of persons allowed will be relaxed to 100% of capacity.

(4) For relevant part of indoor sports premises where all staff and users have been fully vaccinated, users are exempted from wearing masks when exercising in that part of the premises.

(5) For cinemas, performance venues and museums, the maximum number of customers allowed in the premises will be relaxed to 85% of the normal capacity/the seating capacity. For cinemas and performance venues, no more than six consecutive seats in the same row should be occupied.

(6) The maximum number of persons allowed in the spectator stands of public skating rinks, sports premises and swimming pools will be relaxed to 85% of the seating capacity. No more than six consecutive seats in the same row should be occupied.

(7) During the specified period, the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained. They can operate according to the specified operation mode if specified measures are adopted (details in Annex 1 and Annex 2). Otherwise, they should continue to be closed:

- (a) bathhouses;
- (b) premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (c) establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (d) karaoke establishments; and
- (e) mahjong-tin kau premises.

(8) During the specified period, 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 fulfilled (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).

(9) 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-compliant 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

(10) 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.

(11) 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

(12) 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)).

(13) 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.