

Government to relax group gathering measures under Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation and extend expiry dates of regulations under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government will gazette today (February 23) amendments of various regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) to relax the number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places from two to four under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G), and extend the expiry dates of the relevant regulations to September 30, 2021. The relevant amendments will take effect at 0.00am tomorrow (February 24).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Taking into account that the local epidemic wave has continued to subside, as well as the need for society as a whole to resume social and economic activities, we announced earlier to continue to relax social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner, which includes relaxing the number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places from two to four starting from February 24, in order to allow more social and economic activities to resume."

The latest details of requirements and restrictions are as follows:

Group gatherings

Unless exempted, group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will be prohibited during the eight-day period from February 24, 2021 to March 3, 2021. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering business and scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

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.

Extension of expiry dates of regulations

In view of the need to continue implementing various infection control measures subject to the epidemic situation in the near future, there is a need to extend the expiry dates of various regulations under Cap.599, so that the Government can respond swiftly to the epidemic and implement the corresponding measures under the relevant statutory framework.

The Government will extend the expiry dates for the below regulations from March 31, 2021, for six months to September 30, 2021:

- (1) Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C)
- (2) Prevention and Control of Disease (Disclosure of Information) Regulation (Cap. 599D)
- (3) Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E)
- (4) Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F)
- (5) Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G)
- (6) Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)
- (7) Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I)

The spokesman pointed out that extending the expiry dates of the relevant regulations does not imply that the restrictions currently imposed under those regulations would be maintained until the corresponding expiry dates. Rather, the relevant statutory framework has provisions in place to allow flexibility such that the Government may tighten or relax or even suspend specific requirements and conditions subject to developments of the epidemic situation.

Furthermore, the Government has been urging members of the public to comply with the anti-epidemic measures in relation to mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings of more than the maximum number of persons allowed in public places. The Government has also been ensuring the relevant requirements are complied with through promotion and law enforcement, as well as conducting joint operations when necessary. To facilitate law enforcement actions under Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I, the Government has also amended the Schedule in relation to fixed penalty under the relevant regulations to enable the Commissioner for Labour to perform the relevant function.

"We will continue to closely monitor the developments of the epidemic situation and review the various measures in place from time to time with a view to making suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors," the spokesman said.