

Government to resume public services gradually

Following the Government's earlier announcement that, if the epidemic situation does not rebound and remains on a downward trend, most of the social distancing measures will be relaxed in three phases within a period of three months starting from April 21, a Government spokesman announced today (March 25), adding that government departments will resume public services gradually from April 1 with a view to largely resuming normal public services from April 21.

"As the public service provider, the Government needs to be well prepared prior to the phased relaxation of most of the social distancing measures. The Government first implemented on February 16 the Vaccine Pass arrangement for all government employees at government buildings and offices in order to build a strong barrier. Currently, save for those government employees who are medically unfit for vaccination as supported by a valid medical certificate, all government employees working at government venues have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. They are also required to have received the second dose of the vaccine by April 1. Government departments are ready to gradually resume public services from April 1 with a view to largely resuming normal public services from April 21. Due to the restrictions of the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) or its regulations, and given that bureaux and departments will need to mobilise manpower and resources for the overriding mission of fighting against the epidemic, certain non-emergency or non-essential services might continue to be affected, and they may be resumed at a later time. Members of the public are advised to pay attention to the announcements to be made by individual departments on the latest arrangements of their services," the spokesman said.

"Bureaux and departments will continue to adopt targeted social distancing and infection control measures, including staggering of work and lunch hours, arranging video conferencing as far as possible, etc. As there may be a higher demand for various public services at the beginning of the gradual resumption of public services, a longer time may be needed for the processing of applications. We appeal for the understanding of members of the public. In order to put the epidemic situation under a strict control, departments will exercise discretion in continuing the suspension of delivery of services in a face-to-face manner, and switch to provide the services through online channels, post, drop-in boxes or other suitable means. Despite the resumption of the provision of services in a face-to-face manner by the departments, we appeal to the public to continue to receive the services they need through means such as by post, drop-in boxes or online channels. If members of the public have to visit government buildings or offices, they should wear surgical masks at all times and comply with the infection control measures implemented by the relevant departments, including the use of the 'LeaveHomeSafe' mobile application, temperature checks and crowd control

arrangements," the spokesman added.

The spokesman stressed that the fight against the epidemic is still the top priority and most important task of the Government. The Government will continue to mobilise all available manpower and resources for anti-epidemic work. All government employees have to continue to stand ready at all times and participate in anti-epidemic work when called upon by their departments, no matter what their original/usual duties are.

Unlike private organisations, the Government has the responsibility to maintain the functioning of society. Although there are signs that the epidemic situation is stabilising, the spokesman appeals to all employers in Hong Kong to continue to allow their staff members to work from home as far as possible so as to drastically reduce the flow of people and social contact in the community, and to resume normal operation in a gradual, timely and orderly manner in accordance with the announced timeline for a phased relaxation of most of the social distancing measures, and the modes of operation and actual situations of their respective sectors.