

HAD steps up publicity and inspections relating to anti-epidemic regulations (with photo)

The Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) stepped up publicity and inspections relating to the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation).

The Government relaxed social distancing measures in a gradual and orderly manner starting from February 18, 2021. Some of the premises listed in the schedule of the Regulation (the scheduled premises) are allowed to be open subject to relevant requirements and restrictions as set out in the directions issued by the Secretary for Food and Health according to the Regulation (the Directions). On the effective date of the Directions, the OLA uploaded the relevant requirements and restrictions onto the OLA website for easy reference by the premises concerned. In addition, the OLA also issued letters to individual premises notifying them of the applicable requirements and restrictions.

To ensure relevant premises have been operating in compliance with the requirements and restrictions as set out in the Directions, apart from stepping up inspections, the OLA also conducted joint operations with the Police. From February 18 to February 25, the OLA conducted more than 1 600 inspections (including joint operations involving other departments), and 16 verbal warnings were given. Premises inspected were found operating generally in compliance with relevant Directions.

A spokesman for the HAD today (February 26) said, "We would like to thank the managers of the premises for their cooperation, which enabled the implementation of the Government's anti-epidemic policies. As for the few premises that have not been acting in full compliance with the Directions, most of the non-compliances were due to the fact that the managers had not been familiar with the relevant requirements and restrictions. OLA enforcement officers had explained the requirements and gave verbal warnings on-site, with a view to reminding the managers to make necessary rectifications as soon as possible."

The OLA is empowered to conduct inspections and take enforcement actions according to the Regulation for scheduled premises under the OLA's purview (including amusement game centres, club-houses, karaoke establishments, mah jong/tin kau premises and hotels/guesthouses).

According to the Regulation, if the manager of the premises contravenes the Directions, he or she, on conviction, is liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for six months. Customers patronising the scheduled premises should also comply with various anti-epidemic regulations and restrictions,

including the requirements on group gatherings and wearing of masks. Otherwise, he or she may have constituted an offence under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) or the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I), and is liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

The spokesman said, "To minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19, the OLA will continue to step up publicity, inspections and enforcement actions. We urge the managers of hotels, guesthouses, club-houses and amusement game centres to follow the requirements and restrictions under the Regulation. We would also like to remind the managers and the public to exercise self-discipline and co-operate to fight the virus together."

