

Latest directions under Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation and Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation

With the joint efforts of the healthcare sector and the community since early this year, the various public health measures that aim to enhance social distancing and border control have begun to deliver results. As a result, the number of confirmed cases in Hong Kong appears to have stabilised in recent days. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic remains severe and volatile around the globe. With a view to safeguarding against any sudden turn in the COVID-19 situation in Hong Kong that may foil achievements thus far, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) will extend the measures under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (the Regulation) (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) by two weeks. At the same time, the requirements on regulating catering business will be streamlined.

In accordance with Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G, the SFH has issued the latest directions through notices in the Gazette today (April 21) to:

- (1) suspend the requirement for the number of customers in catering business premises at any one time to not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises; and
- (2) extend all other implemented requirements regarding catering business, scheduled premises and prohibition of group gathering by 14 days to be effective from 0.00am on April 24, 2020, till May 7, 2020.

A summary of the latest directions is in the Annex.

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau reminded the persons responsible for carrying on catering business and the managers of scheduled premises that contravening the above requirements would be a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Separately, any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of the gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of the gathering, commits an offence. 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 \$2,000.

As at 0.00am on April 20, a total of 35 persons responsible for catering or scheduled premises had been prosecuted for operating in contravention of the regulations or failing to comply with the operational directions under Cap. 599F. In particular, one of the persons responsible for carrying on the business of a bar in contravention of the Regulation had been sentenced to one week's imprisonment by the court. As for the prohibition of group gathering, enforcement departments issued 131 fixed penalty tickets in accordance with Cap. 599G against persons participating in prohibited group gatherings, and instituted prosecution against three suspected cases of organising prohibited group gatherings. Departments will continue to carry out inspections and ensure operators of premises and members of the public comply with the regulations.

The spokesperson said that the above directions could help further enhance social distancing. The Government has been reviewing the feasibility of relevant measures and will make timely adjustments in view of the latest developments of the disease.