

Lifting of certain social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government will gazette the directions and amendments under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) as appropriate to relax some of the social distancing measures in relation to catering business, scheduled premises and group gathering in public places. The latest measures will come into effect from May 8, 2020 for 14 days till May 21, 2020.

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau said today (May 5), "In light of the more stabilised situation in Hong Kong in terms of the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the recent weeks and the 'suppress and lift' strategy adopted to contain the epidemic, a window of opportunity exists for us to lift some of the social distancing measures at the moment."

Key requirements under the latest measures

Following the directions and amendments under Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G, the latest social distancing measures will be as follows –

On catering business and scheduled premises

(1) For catering business, the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table within any catering premises will be increased from four to eight. Previously announced requirements (at Annex 1) continue to apply including keeping a distance of at least 1.5 metres between tables and wearing mask except consuming food or drinks. Karaoke activities carried out on any premises should continue to be suspended.

(2) Catering premises (or part thereof) exclusively or mainly used for the sale or supply of intoxicating liquors as defined in section 53(1) of the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109) (i.e. bars and pubs) will be allowed to resume operation subject to the following conditions –

- (a) the number of customers must not at any one time exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of that premises (or part thereof);
- (b) no more than four persons may be seated together at one table therein, irrespective of the hour of operation; and
- (c) live performance and dancing must not be allowed.

(3) The following scheduled premises will be allowed to resume operation subject to conditions (summarised at Annex 1) –

- (a) amusement game centre;
- (b) fitness centre;
- (c) place of amusement;

- (d) place of public entertainment;
- (e) beauty parlour;
- (f) massage establishment; and
- (g) mahjong-tin kau premises; and

Club-house will be allowed to continue operation subject to conditions (see Annex 1).

- (4) The following scheduled premises will be required to remain closed for 14 days –
- (a) bathhouse;
 - (b) party room;
 - (c) club or night club; and
 - (d) karaoke establishment.

On group gatherings

(5) The number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places will be relaxed from four to eight.

(6) The scope of existing exempted group gatherings will be expanded (at Annex 2): (a) to cover different functions of the Judiciary; (b) to increase the maximum number of persons at wedding ceremonies (at which no food or drink is served) from 20 to 50; and (c) to cover shareholders' meeting of a listed company that is held in accordance with any ordinance or regulatory instrument, subject to no food or drink being served and no more than 50 persons in a room or partitioned area.

(7) As an interface between Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G, gatherings within scheduled premises which could be opened according to directions issued under section 8 of Cap. 599F will not be subject to the restriction on group gatherings (of no more than eight persons) under Cap 599G.

A spokesperson added, "The above measures have balanced the oft-competing factors of public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance. They could help maintain social distancing while allowing room for resumption of social activities. The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation and review the various measures in place with a view to suitably adjusting them taking into account all relevant factors."

Persons responsible for carrying on catering business and the managers of scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F 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 such gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such 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 \$2,000.