

Government announces latest disease prevention measures

The Government today (June 2) announced the latest disease prevention measures and arrangements under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599).

The situation of COVID-19 outbreak in Hong Kong and the number of confirmed cases have slightly stabilised in the past month or so, but remain very volatile, with local cluster cases reported again recently. At the same time, the global situation remains severe. As at June 1, 2020, 218 countries/territories/areas reported a total of around 5.98 million COVID-19 cases. Since late March, about 70 000 to 110 000 new cases have been reported daily around the world. On the other hand, despite significant improvement in the situation in the Mainland, individual provinces/regions continue to report some imported and local cases in the past few weeks.

The above situation reflects the fact that the pandemic is yet to be over whether in Hong Kong or places outside Hong Kong. Indeed, the World Health Organization and health experts advised that COVID-19 would not be eradicated without effective treatment and vaccination. Individual countries and regions need to keep adjusting the intensity of their infection control measures in light of the circumstances, taking into account their respective economic and social needs. The Government's priority at the moment is not to completely eliminate the virus or to achieve sustained zero infection level, but to incorporate disease prevention and control, as well as infection management, into the new normal of the daily operation of the society.

Specifically, the Government will continue to adopt the "suppress and lift" strategy, and maintain the relevant disease prevention measures when the epidemic continues, including immigration control and social distancing measures. When drawing up the relevant measures, the Government has all along endeavoured to strike a balance among the factors of public health protection, economic impact and social acceptance, in order to maintain the aforementioned disease prevention measures while allowing room for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities of the society when situation permits. In parallel, to achieve the goals of early identification, early isolation and early treatment, the Government will enhance virus surveillance in the community in order to identify asymptomatic infected persons as soon as possible to break the invisible transmission chain at an early stage.

Social distancing measures

In view of the above development of the epidemic and the strategy in combatting the disease, there is a need to continue to maintain the relevant legal framework in the upcoming period to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community through various social distancing measures. For this purpose, the Government has gazetted today the amendments and directions 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 follows:

(1) The expiry dates of Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G will be extended by around two months to August 31, 2020.

Catering premises and scheduled premises

(2) The existing regulations and restrictions on catering premises and scheduled premises will be maintained, with refinements made having regard to circumstances on the ground (see Annex). Amongst others, activities and facilities involving higher health risks such as live performance, dancing activities, steam and sauna facilities, etc. will continue to be suspended or prohibited.

Group Gatherings

(3) Unless exempted, group gatherings at public places will continue to be prohibited.

The latest directions under Cap. 599F and Cap. 599G will be effective from 0.00am on June 5, 2020 for a period of 14 days till June 18, 2020.

A spokesperson said, "The Government will review the various measures in place from time to time in accordance with the development of the epidemic situation, and will make suitable adjustments taking into account all relevant factors."

Immigration control measures

In addition to social distancing measures in the community, there is a need to continue restrictions of movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implement compulsory quarantine measures to prevent imported cases. In the meantime, the Government holds the view that there is a need to introduce a mechanism to allow consideration of gradual relaxation of compulsory quarantine requirements for persons arriving from specific countries and places after assessing the relevant public health risks.

To this end, the Government has gazetted amendments to the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) today. The amendments will be effective from 0.00am on June 5, 2020 with details as follows:

(1) A mechanism will be introduced to empower the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) to specify two categories of places. For persons arriving from these categories of places:

- (a) For Category 1 specified places, those persons will be subject to compulsory quarantine arrangements; or
- (b) For Category 2 specified places, those persons will be excluded from the

requirements in respect of the compulsory quarantine arrangements subject to meeting certain conditions (such as obtaining a negative COVID-19 test result).

The above arrangements pertaining to Category 1 and 2 places are applicable to both places within and outside China. At this stage, SFH has, in accordance with Cap. 599C and Cap. 599E, published a notice in the gazette today to specify all places in China outside Hong Kong and all places outside China as Category 1 specified places with effect from 0.00am on June 5, 2020. That is, unless exempted pursuant to the regulations, arrivals from these places will be subject to the compulsory quarantine arrangements.

(2) The criteria for the Chief Secretary for Administration to exempt travellers from the compulsory quarantine arrangements under Cap. 599E will be expanded to cover persons whose travelling is necessary for purposes relating to manufacturing operations, business activities or the provision of professional services in the interest of Hong Kong's economic development, and thus be aligned with relevant provisions under Cap. 599C.

(3) Taking into account the need to continue to restrict movement of people between Hong Kong and other places and implement compulsory quarantine measures in the upcoming period, as well as development of the epidemic situation in places within and outside China, the Government will extend the expiry date of Cap. 599C by a month to July 7, 2020 and that of Cap. 599E by three months to September 18, 2020.

The spokesperson said, "The current amendments mainly serve to provide a statutory basis on which the Government may make, based on latest developments, assessment on the latest public health risks of relevant countries and regions, and in turn determine their category of specified places as the epidemic situation changes locally and overseas. The relevant mechanism provides us the flexibility to discuss immigration control measures other than compulsory quarantine with relevant regions subject to their public health risks, thus encouraging gradual resumption of movement of people and thereby spurring related economic activities. We have all along maintained close communication with relevant Mainland and Macao authorities on this front under the framework of joint prevention and control. We will announce the relevant details as soon as possible should there be new arrangements."

The above amendments to the four regulations are made in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599). Section 8 of Cap. 599 empowers the Chief Executive in Council to make public health emergency regulations for the purposes of preventing, combating or alleviating the effects of a public health emergency and protecting public health.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and the managers of scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F would have committed 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.