

Government extends existing social distancing measures

The Government announced today (August 9) the gazettal of the extension of existing social distancing measures in accordance with the public health emergency regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance. The measures will be effective from August 11 to August 24.

The number of daily new cases in Hong Kong remains high at four-digit figures, with the overall number of hospitalised patients consistently exceeding 1 000 without signs of a steady downward trend. In particular, cases related to Omicron mutant strain sub-lineages BA.4/BA.5 have also increased. In order to contain the risk of virus transmission and balance the needs for allowing social and economic activities, the Government has decided to maintain the existing social distancing measures for the next 14-day cycle without making any relaxation. Relevant measures include allowing all catering premises and scheduled premises to continue to operate subject to strict compliance with the requirements including use of the Vaccine Pass and "LeaveHomeSafe". Other requirements, such as mask-wearing for citizens on transport carriers and in specified public places, as well as prohibition of group gatherings in public places, also remain in force.

The Government in particular reminds persons-in-charge of premises of the introduction of the Red Code and Amber Code under the Vaccine Pass to differentiate persons with a higher risk of infection of COVID-19 starting from today. Confirmed cases will be categorised as persons with a Red Code, and inbound persons from overseas places or Taiwan will be categorised as persons with an Amber Code. Their Vaccine Pass QR codes will be displayed in red or amber accordingly. Persons-in-charge of premises should deny entry of relevant persons to relevant premises in accordance with relevant rules, and make practicable and feasible arrangements to ensure that staff who are categorised as persons with a Red Code will not enter the premises. If any person holding an Amber Code works in the premises, the persons-in-charge of the premises must ensure that such staff will strictly observe the anti-epidemic measures including mask-wearing. In addition, persons-in-charge or managers of the premises that are required to use the QR Code Verification Scanner should update their scanner to version 4.4.0 or above as soon as possible before August 12, and ensure that the relevant mobile devices maintain an Internet connection during the operating hours of the premises no later than August 23 (see [press release](#) for details).

Specific measures (see details of the restrictions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) in Annex 1) to be in force during the period from August 11 to August 24 include:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 0.00am to 4.59am every day, save for specific premises (see Annex 2), a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must continue to cease selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises of the business, and close any premises or part of the premises (whichever is applicable) on which food or drink is sold or supplied by the business for consumption on the premises. The premises concerned may still sell or supply food and/or drink for takeaway services and deliveries. A person responsible for carrying on a catering business is also required to put up a notice at the entrance to the catering premises to remind patrons that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises. All patrons who enter the bar/pub zone inside a catering premises must continue to present proof of a negative rapid antigen test (RAT) result obtained within 24 hours before entering the relevant zone. Otherwise, they should be denied entry to the relevant zone. The maximum number of persons per table for catering premises will be eight, and banquets with no more than 120 persons will be allowed. Live performance and dancing activity will remain prohibited therein.

(2) Bars/pubs may open every day from 5am to 1.59am of the subsequent day with a maximum number of four persons per table and the total number of patrons capped at 75 per cent of their capacity. Live performance and dancing activity will remain prohibited therein. All patrons of bars/pubs must continue to present proof of a negative RAT result obtained within 24 hours before entering the relevant premises. Otherwise, they should be denied entry.

(3) Other requirements and restrictions on catering premises and bars/pubs will continue to remain in force, including that all patrons, when they are away from the table, must not consume food or drink and must wear a mask, and they must scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones/other mobile devices before entering the premises (excluding persons who only order takeaway). Operators of catering premises and bars/pubs are required to use the latest "QR Code Verification Scanner" mobile application provided by the Government to scan the QR code of a patron's vaccination record, medical exemption certificate or recovery record.

(II) Scheduled premises

(4) For swimming pools, sports premises, fitness centres, beauty parlours and massage establishments, places of public entertainment, places of amusement, amusement game centres, event premises, religious premises, barber shops/hair salons, bathhouses, party rooms, clubs/nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises and cruise ships, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F. In particular, live performance and dancing activity remain prohibited in clubs/nightclubs, and their patrons should continue to be denied entry unless they can present proof of a negative RAT result obtained within 24 hours before entering the relevant premises. Staff members and patrons alike must wear a mask at all times save for exempted circumstances. Citizens are allowed not to wear masks when they are exercising in sports premises as well as fitness centres which meet the

requirement on air change.

(5) For club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, managers must continue to comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, and the catering premises, bars/pubs and scheduled premises therein must comply with all applicable requirements.

(6) For shopping malls, department stores, supermarkets and markets, the manager/person-in-charge must continue to comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F, including fulfilling the relevant requirements on use of "LeaveHomeSafe" and the Vaccine Pass under "passive checking".

(7) The restriction on the number of persons allowed in premises such as cinemas, performance venues, museums, event premises and religious premises, etc, will remain at 85 per cent of their capacity. Patrons may eat and drink in cinema houses.

(III) Mask-wearing requirement

(8) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) will be extended. A person must wear a mask all the time when the person is boarding or on board a public transport carrier, is entering or present in an MTR paid area, or is entering or present in a specified public place. Citizens are allowed not to wear masks if they are present in outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208), or are conducting strenuous physical activity (e.g. exercising or jogging) in outdoor public places.

(9) Under Cap. 599I, if a person does not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement, an authorised person may deny that person from boarding a public transport carrier or entering the area concerned, as well as require that person to wear a mask and disembark from the carrier or leave the said area. A person in contravention of the relevant provision commits an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). In addition, authorised public officers may issue penalty notices to persons who do not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement and such persons may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty at \$5,000.

(IV) Group gatherings

(10) Unless exempted, group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will remain prohibited. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering premises, bars/pubs and scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

(11) Subject to relevant requirements, local group tours with no more than 30 persons may continue to be conducted. The relevant requirements include (i) relevant staff have received three doses of vaccine, and conducted an RAT on the same day before the commencement of local group tour activities, and (ii)

all tour participants have fulfilled the prevailing Vaccine Pass requirements. If all tour participants have conducted an RAT on the same day of the tour before the commencement of local group tour activities, the relevant restriction on the number of participants will be relaxed to 100 persons.

(12) Any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such a gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such a gathering commits an offence under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Gathering) Regulation (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 at \$5,000.

A Government spokesman said, "As the epidemic situation in Hong Kong has not yet stabilised, citizens should continue to stay on guard and strictly observe social distancing measures. COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective for preventing severe cases or deaths, and the minimum age for receiving vaccine has been lowered to 6 months old. We urge citizens to arrange for the elderly and children to get vaccinated as early as possible, thereby protecting public health together."