

Government extends social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government announced on February 2 that it has gazetted directions and specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) to maintain most of the social distancing measures currently in place. The directions and specifications will take effect on February 4, 2021 for a period of 14 days till February 17, 2021.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong remains serious. The latest 7-day average number of local cases with unknown source of infection was close to 15 and a number of confirmed cases were found in certain districts over a short period of time, which showed that silent transmission in the community is still active."

"The Government tightened social distancing measures on December 10, 2020 and extended the measures for 14 days on December 24, 2020 and January 7, 2021 respectively. The Government further extended the measures for seven days on January 21 and January 28, 2021. Taking into account the latest public health risk assessment, and to reduce the infection risks arising from frequent social activities during the Lunar New Year, the Government will maintain existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business premises and most of the scheduled premises, as well as the requirements for group gatherings and mask wearing for 14 days to February 17, 2021 (Wednesday)."

"To allow members of the public to relax while keeping social distance, the Government will reopen specified outdoor sports premises for activities involving little physical contact starting from February 4, 2021 (Thursday). Meanwhile, to reduce the relevant infection risks as much as possible, we will require the persons responsible for carrying on the premises to arrange staff to undergo testing regularly, and ensure users of the premises to record their visits to the premises through the 'LeaveHomeSafe' mobile app or other means, in order to facilitate contact tracing when there is any case. We will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic situation and review and adjust the various measures in place from time to time. We will announce the latest social distancing measures in a timely manner."

The details of the extended requirements and restrictions are as follows:

Catering business and scheduled premises

(1) The requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business and most of the scheduled premises (details at Annex 1) will be maintained during the 14-day period from February 4, 2021 to February 17, 2021, including the following requirements: from 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, save for specific premises (details at Annex 2), a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must cease selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises of the business; no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises; bars or pubs will continue to be closed; and except specified outdoor sports premises, club-houses and hotels or guesthouses, all scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F must be closed.

(2) Specified outdoor sports premises, namely athletic tracks in sports grounds, tennis courts and tennis practice courts, golf courses, golf driving ranges and practice greens, bowling greens, shooting ranges, archery ranges, cycling parks, horse riding schools, radio-controlled model aircraft flying fields, sea activities centres for water sports (including but not limited to canoeing, kayaking, sailing, yachting, windsurfing, rowing, dragonboating, water-skiing, stand-up paddling, diving and surfing), climbing walls, gateball courts, outdoor table tennis tables and outdoor badminton courts may be open subject to relevant requirements and restrictions. The measures include that any person within the sports premises is required to wear a mask before and after exercise, except when having a shower or consuming food/drink; and each group must consist of no more than two persons and there must be effective partitions in between groups. In addition, users should be required to scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code or register their names, contact number and the date and time of the visit as far as feasible before the person is allowed to enter the premises. Staff involved in the operation of the premises should also undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test once every 14 days.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and 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.

Group gathering

(3) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than two persons in public places will continue during the 14-day period from February 4, 2021 to February 17, 2021. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering business and scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

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 gathering commits an offence under the 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 \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(4) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended for a period of 14 days from February 4, 2021 to February 17, 2021. During the aforementioned period, 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 (i.e. all public places, save for outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208)).

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 fixed 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 of \$5,000.