

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

The Government gazetted the 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 the social distancing measures currently in place, and strengthen infection control measures in catering business premises in view of the recent cluster of cases. The directions and specifications will take effect on March 4, 2021 for a period of 14 days till March 17, 2021.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Since the gradual and orderly relaxation of social distancing measures on February 18, the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong remains volatile. 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."

"Taking into account the latest public health risk assessment, there is no room for further relaxation of measures at this stage. The Government will therefore maintain most of the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business premises and scheduled premises, as well as the requirements for group gatherings and mask wearing for 14 days until March 17, 2021 (Wednesday). In view of the recent cluster in eateries, the Government will require catering business premises to dedicate staff for clearing used utensils and cleaning and disinfecting used tables and partitions, in order to reduce the relevant infection risk."

"The existing arrangement for regular testing of staff of catering business premises and scheduled premises will continue, as it helps breaking the silent transmission chain in the community promptly. We note that one of the testing contractors of the Hospital Authority (HA) generated testing results behind schedule as a result of an influx of testing demand within a short period of time from employees in the construction sector and staff of catering business premises and scheduled premises. HA is following up the situation. According to our records, setting aside that particular testing contractor, the majority of citizens who returned deep throat saliva (DTS) specimen bottles since early last week could receive testing results in two to three days. Since February 26, testing contractors have generally resumed completing most of the tests within two days. The Government and HA have increased the number of contractors and redistributed the specimen bottles to different contractors with a view to allowing most of the citizens who return the DTS specimen bottles to receive testing results within two days. The Government will continue to monitor closely, and help rationalise the workload among contractors where necessary."

"In the past two weeks, citizens who have undertaken tests with professional nasopharyngeal swab and combined nasal and throat swab at Community Testing Centres (CTCs) or mobile specimen collection stations could basically receive testing results in one to two days. More than 30 000 quotas are available at CTCs daily, and the booking rate for the coming seven days is only about 27 per cent. Employees of the construction sector and staff of catering business premises and scheduled premises can receive free testing with online booking."

The details of the latest requirements and restrictions (see Annex 1 for requirements and restrictions under Cap. 599F) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) During the 14-day period from March 4, 2021 to March 17, 2021, dedicated staff must be arranged in catering business premises for clearing used utensils and cleaning and disinfecting used tables and partitions. If this arrangement is not practicable, it must be ensured that the staff carrying out the aforementioned duties must adopt hand hygiene measures before switching to perform other duties, and should adopt hand hygiene measures as necessary during each round of cleaning-up duties. Hand hygiene measures include using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, washing hands or changing gloves.

(2) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business will be maintained during the aforementioned period, including:

(a) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business adopts specified infection control measures (including ensuring that users (excluding persons who only order takeaways) scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before the persons are allowed to enter the premises; and arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days), the catering premises can provide dine-in services from 5.00 am to 9.59 pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than four persons seated together at one table;

(b) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business does not adopt the specified infection control measures, the catering premises can only provide dine-in services from 5.00 am to 5.59 pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than two persons seated together at one table;

(c) Bars or pubs will continue to be closed;

(d) No live performance, dancing activity, karaoke or mahjong-tin kau

activity is allowed in catering premises;

(e) The number of persons participating in any one banquet at any one time may not exceed 20 persons; and

(f) Other requirements and restrictions, including that all persons must wear masks at any time in the premises except when eating or drinking, body temperature screening on persons before entering the premises and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Scheduled premises

(3) During the 14-day period from March 4, 2021 to March 17, 2021, the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained, including that some scheduled premises can be open when the relevant requirements and restrictions are fulfilled (including ensuring that users scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before the persons are allowed to enter the premises; and arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days).

(4) Following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will continue to be closed:

- (a) bathhouses;
- (b) premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;
- (c) establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;
- (d) karaoke establishments;
- (e) mahjong-tin kau premises; and
- (f) swimming pools.

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

(5) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the 14-day period from March 4, 2021 to March 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 a 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 \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(6) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended for a period of 14 days from March 4, 2021 to March 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.