

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

The Government will gazette 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) today (September 23) to largely maintain the social distancing measures currently in place. The relevant measures will take effect at 0.00am on September 25 for a period of seven days till October 1.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "In light of the fact that local epidemic wave has continued to subside, the Government has relaxed social distancing measures in phases under a refined and sophisticated approach in a gradual and orderly manner over the past four weeks. Such relaxation includes raising the limit on the number of persons allowed in group gatherings in public places, extending the hours when dine-in services are allowed and relaxing the number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table at catering business premises, and reopening all catering business and scheduled premises. Under the new normal, having regard to the experience in combating the third wave of the epidemic as well as the local circumstances, despite the Government's intention to allow members of the public to resume social and economic activities to a certain extent, it would not be possible for the Government to relax the social distancing measures by a large extent to the level of relaxation earlier in June, given the need to continuously reduce the risk of virus transmission in the community to prevent a rebound of the epidemic situation.

Taking into account the latest assessment of public health risk, starting this Friday (September 25), apart from minor refinements to the opening arrangements for billiard establishments, public bowling-alleys and shower facilities, the Government will maintain other restrictions applicable to catering business premises and scheduled premises. In addition, starting from October 1, performance with live audience may resume in some places of public entertainment subject to the latest requirements and restrictions and the adoption of sufficient epidemic prevention measures.

The spokesman added, "The Government will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic situation and announce the latest social distancing measures in a timely manner while striking a balance among disease prevention and control, economic needs and level of acceptance of the society. We would like to stress that, co-operation and self-discipline of members of the public is the key to the effectiveness of social distancing measures in preventing the spread of the disease in the community. Only with the co-operation of the public as a whole can the Government continue to allow resumption of social and economic activities in a gradual and orderly

manner. Otherwise, when there is a rebound of the epidemic situation with another large-scale outbreak in the community, the Government will have no choice but to significantly tighten social distancing measures in order to safeguard public health.

"In fact, the epidemic situation in Hong Kong has not yet fully stabilised. Silent transmission chains still exist in the community. While we understand that members of the public wish to resume social and economic activities as soon as practicable, full co-operation of the public to continue to stay vigilant, maintain personal hygiene, observe epidemic prevention measures and keep social distancing is still essential at this stage to bring the epidemic situation under control and to sustain the hard-earned normal life and economic activities. As such, the Government calls on the public to continue maintaining the awareness of epidemic prevention when resuming social and economic activities, especially during the long weekend with the National Day and the day following Mid-Autumn Festival holidays in early October, and to continue to maintain personal and environmental hygiene with a view to preventing another outbreak in the community and the hard work the entire community has put in for more than two months from going in vain."

The requirements and restrictions under the latest directions and specifications (details of the arrangements for premises under Cap. 599F at Annex 1) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) From 0.00am to 4.59am, 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; and close any premises, or part of the premises, 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 customers that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises;

(2) The number of customers at any catering premises at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises. No more than four persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises;

(3) Tables available for use or being used by customers within any catering premises must be arranged in a way to ensure there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres or partition(s) which could serve as an effective buffer between one table and another table at the premises;

(4) Any premises (commonly known as bar or pub) or the part of catering premises that is 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) for consumption in that premises or that part of the

catering premises can be opened, but the number of customers at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of that premises and no more than two persons may be seated together at one table; and

(5) Live performance and dancing must not be allowed in any catering premises. All karaoke activities carried on at any catering premises and mahjong-tin kau playing facility provided therein must comply with the applicable restrictions and requirements. Other requirements and restrictions in relation to catering business premises would remain in effect, including wearing a mask at all times within any catering premises except when the person is consuming food or drink; conducting body temperature screening for all persons entering the premises; and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Scheduled premises

(6) The following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F may be open subject to relevant requirements and restrictions:

(a) Amusement game centre: The measures include that game stations, machines or facilities next to one another and less than 1.5 metres apart must not be made available for use at the same time, or that there is some form of effective partitioning; no more than four persons may be allowed at each game station, machine or facility, etc;

(b) Bathhouse: The measures include that there must be a distance of at least 1.5 metres between persons having a bath; any person within the bathhouse is required to wear a mask at all times except when having a shower or a bath, etc;

(c) Fitness centre: The measures include that any person within the fitness centre is required to wear a mask at all times except when having a shower or when the person is doing exercise with a distance of at least 1.5 metres from any other person (except a coach or a person working at the fitness centre who should keep wearing a mask); no more than four persons may be allowed at each fitness station, machine or equipment; each training group or class must consist of no more than four persons and if there are more than four persons, it must be arranged in sub-groups of no more than four persons and there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres between each sub-group, etc;

(d) Place of amusement: The measures include that any person within the public bowling alley and billiard establishment is required to wear a mask at all times except when having a shower; no more than four persons may be allowed to play at each billiard table or each lane; only group/private lesson is allowed at ice skating rinks; any person within the ice skating rinks is required to wear a mask at all times except when the person (other than a coach or a staff) is doing exercise with a distance of at least 1.5 metres from any other person, etc;

(e) Place of public entertainment: The measures include that entertainment stations, machines or facilities next to one another and less than 1.5 metres apart must not be made available for use at the same time, or that there is

some form of effective partitioning; for cinema, tickets to be sold and seats to be occupied of each house for film screening must not exceed 75 per cent of the seating capacity of the house, seating must be arranged in a way that no more than four consecutive seats in the same row may be occupied, no eating or drinking inside a house is allowed, etc; for performance venue, performance with live audience can be resumed starting from October 1, there must be adequate distancing or some form of effective partitioning between performers and the audience, tickets to be sold and seats to be occupied must not exceed 50 per cent of the seating capacity of that place, seating must be arranged in a way that no more than four consecutive seats in the same row may be occupied; the number of visitors in theme park and museum must not exceed 50 per cent of the capacity of the premises; ball pits must be closed, etc;

(f) Premises (commonly known as party room) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings: The measures include that any person within the party room is required to wear a mask at all times except when consuming food or drink; no more than four persons may be allowed at each room; all furniture and facilities must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each booked session; ball pits must be closed, etc;

(g) Beauty parlour and massage establishment: The measures include that all staff must wear protective gears such as masks and face shield/goggles at all times when providing service to customers and the relevant gears have to be changed or sanitised after service is provided to a customer; customers may only be served upon appointment; no more than four persons may be allowed in each partitioned service area, etc;

(h) Club-house: Catering premises within the club-house must operate in accordance with the above restrictions and requirements stipulated for catering business, including the requirement to cease dine-in services during specific periods; amusement game centre, bathhouse, fitness centre, place of amusement, venue with public entertainment, party room, beauty parlour and massage establishment, club or nightclub, mahjong-tin kau premises, karaoke establishment, sports premises and swimming pool may also be open subject to compliance with the restrictions and requirements applicable to the relevant premises, etc;

(i) Establishment (commonly known as club or nightclub) that is open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment: The number of customers at the premises at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises; no more than two persons may be seated together at one table; live performance and dancing must not be allowed, etc;

(j) Karaoke establishment: The measures include that any person within the karaoke establishment is required to wear a mask at all times except when consuming food or drink; no more than four persons may be allowed in each room; all furniture and facilities must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each booked session, etc;

(k) Mahjong-tin kau premises: The measures include that any person within the

mahjong-tin kau premises is required to wear a mask at all times; tile sets must be replaced with cleaned and disinfected ones every time a new player joins or application of disinfection materials with durable efficacy must be applied on the tile sets, etc;

(l) Sports premises: The measures include that any person is required to wear a mask at all times except having a shower, or when the person is doing exercise within any outdoor sports premises, or when the person (other than a coach or a person working at the premises) within any indoor sports premises is doing exercise with a distance of at least 1.5 metres from any other person or is doing certain exercise; each group must consist of no more than four persons; there must be at least 1.5 metres between each group, etc; and

(m) Swimming pool: The measures include that any person is required to wear a mask at all times except swimming, or having a shower, or when the person is doing warm-up exercise with a distance of at least 1.5 metres from any other person; the number of persons to be allowed at any one time must not exceed 50 per cent of the designed capacity of the swimming pool; each group must consist of no more than four persons; there must be at least 1.5 metres between each group; if there are more than four persons, it must be arranged in sub-groups of no more than four persons and there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres between each sub-group etc.

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

(7) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the aforementioned seven-day period.

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.

Mask-wearing Requirement

(8) The Secretary for Food and Health will specify, by way of a notice published in the Gazette for the purpose of the mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I, a period of seven days from September 25 till October 1. During this seven-day period, a person must wear a mask at all times when the person is boarding or onboard 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 2 (\$5,000). 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 \$2,000.