

Government further relaxes social distancing measures

As the epidemic trend continued to be stabilised, the Government announced on May 3 the further relaxation of social distancing measures as follows, with a view to relaunching social and economic activities in an orderly manner:

- Starting from May 5 (this Thursday), early relaxation in measures will allow catering premises to accommodate eight persons at most per table, re-opening of swimming pools, gazetted beaches, as well as water sports centres and public swimming pools under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), and not wearing masks when present in country parks or when conducting strenuous physical activity in outdoor places.
- Starting from May 19, the second stage of relaxation in social distancing measures will be implemented as scheduled. That includes extension of the dinnertime dine-in service hours in catering premises, allowing bars/pubs as well as other scheduled premises regulated under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) which are currently closed, and allowing eating and drinking in cinemas etc.

The Government announced earlier (March 21 and April 14) the adjustments of social distancing measures in three stages. Following the first stage of relaxation in social distancing measures since April 21, the fifth-wave epidemic situation in Hong Kong has remained under control by virtue of the co-operation of citizens and relevant sectors in attaching importance to health protection and complying with anti-epidemic measures. As the number of daily new cases has been on a continuous downward trend without any salient sign of rebound, coupled with the fact that the Vaccine Pass requirement for having received two doses of vaccine for entering relevant premises has been put in place since April 30, the Government considered that Hong Kong is ready under this condition to implement on this basis the second stage of relaxation in social distancing measures from May 19 as previously announced, and suitably advance the relaxation of certain measures for implementation from May 5.

Starting from May 5, the three social distancing measures which will be relaxed in advance include (1) raising the current maximum number of persons per table in catering premises from four to eight; (2) allowing swimming pools to re-open on the conditions that users must wear masks at all times save for exercising or taking a shower etc. The LCSD will also be gradually re-opening gazetted beaches, water sports centres and public swimming pools under its management; and (3) citizens are allowed not to wear masks when they are present in outdoor areas of country parks, conducting strenuous

physical activity in outdoor public places or exercising in outdoor sports premises.

Unless there is a substantial rebound or drastic change in the epidemic situation, the Government will implement the second stage of relaxation in social distancing measures starting from May 19 as scheduled. This includes (1) the dine-in service hours allowed for catering premises will be extended to 11.59pm; (2) bars / pubs can be re-opened with service hours up to 1.59am and a maximum number of four persons per table; (3) the remaining scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F which are currently closed (including bathhouses, party rooms, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, and cruise ships) can be re-opened; (4) the restriction of the number of persons allowed in premises such as cinemas, performance venues, museums, event premises and religious premises etc. will be relaxed to 85 per cent of their capacity, while eating and drinking will be allowed in cinemas; and (5) citizens are also allowed not to wear masks when they are exercising in indoor sports premises, as well as fitness centres which meet the requirement on air change.

All catering premises, bars / pubs and scheduled premises will continue to implement the Vaccine Pass arrangement. All persons entering the relevant premises must comply with the vaccination requirements except under exempted scenarios (see [implementation arrangements for Vaccine Pass](#) for details). All persons-in-charge of specified premises are also required to put up a notice and / or check the patrons' vaccination records or exemption certificates. Furthermore, the Government reminded citizens that the third stage of Vaccine Pass will be implemented on May 31, from then onwards the basic requirement for entering premises applicable to Vaccine Pass will be raised to three doses of vaccine. The arrangement for using "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application in various premises will also remain in place.

To avoid a rebound in the epidemic situation, the Government urged citizens to continue observing all applicable social distancing measures and receive the third dose of vaccine as early as possible to contain the risk of spreading the virus. Eligible persons, especially for the elderly aged 60 or above, should also receive the fourth dose of vaccine as quickly as practicable to substantially reduce the risk of severe cases or deaths, thereby protecting themselves and their family members.

Regarding the two cycles starting from May 5, which will last for four weeks in total, relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F are detailed in Annex 1A (effective during the period of May 5 to May 18) and Annex 1B (effective during the period of May 19 to June 1) respectively. Key measures are summarised below:

(I) Catering business

(1) From 10pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day during the period of May 5 to May 18, and from 0am to 4.59am during the period of May 19 to June 1, 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 customers that food or drink should not be consumed in areas adjacent to the catering premises.

(2) Starting from May 5, the maximum number of persons per table for catering premises will be raised to eight. During the period of May 5 to May 18, banquets with no more than 20 persons will be allowed in catering premises; and starting from May 19, the maximum number of persons in a banquet will be raised to 120.

(3) Live performance and dancing activity are still not allowed in catering premises. As for karaoke or mahjong-tin kau activity etc. in catering premises, they should remain suspended during the period of May 5 to May 18, and may be resumed starting from May 19.

(4) Bars / pubs will remain closed during the period of May 5 to May 18; and during the period of May 19 to June 1 may open from 5am to 1.59am of the subsequent day with a maximum number of four persons per table and restriction of patrons to 75 per cent of their capacity. Live performance and dancing activity are not allowed therein.

(5) Other requirements and restrictions on catering premises and bars / pubs upon re-opening will continue to remain in force, including that all customers, 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 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

(6) Scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F as listed below must continue to suspend operation during the period of May 5 to May 18, and may re-open starting from May 19:

- (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) Cruise ships (i.e. suspension of "cruise-to-nowhere" itineraries). The Government is now updating the anti-epidemic requirements for "cruise-to-

nowhere" itineraries in view of the latest need for epidemic control, and will shortly inform cruise operators to facilitate their resumption of the trips.

(7) 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. During the period of May 5 to May 18, facilities therein that are being used or operated as premises mentioned in points (4) and (6) above must be closed.

(8) 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 and barber shops or hair salons, as well as bathhouses, party rooms, clubs or nightclubs, karaoke establishments, mahjong-tin kau premises, and cruise ships which may be re-opened starting from May 19, managers must comply with the relevant restrictions under Cap. 599F. Staff members and customers alike must wear a mask at all times save for the exempted circumstances. Starting from May 5, citizens are allowed not to wear masks when they are exercising in outdoor sports premises; and starting from May 19, citizens are also allowed not to wear masks when they are exercising in indoor sports premises, as well as fitness centres which meet the requirement on air change.

(9) 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 "LeaveHomeSafe" and the Vaccine Pass under "passive checking".

(10) Starting from May 19, the restriction of the number of persons allowed in premises such as cinemas, performance venues, museums, event premises and religious premises etc. will be relaxed to 85 per cent of their capacity. Patrons may also eat and drink in cinema houses with effect from May 19.

(III) Mask-wearing requirement

(11) Starting from May 5, the mandatory mask-wearing requirement under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) will be relaxed. 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 conducting strenuous physical activity (e.g. exercising or jogging) in outdoor public places.

(12) 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

(13) 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.

(14) Subject to relevant requirements, local group tours with no more than 30 persons may continue to be conducted. The relevant requirements include (1) relevant staff has received three doses of vaccine, and conducted a rapid antigen test (RAT) on the same day before the commencement of local group tour activities; and (2) all tour participants have fulfilled the prevailing Vaccine Pass requirements. If all tour participants have conducted RAT on the same day before the commencement of local group tour activities, the relevant restriction on the number of participants will be relaxed to 100 persons.

(15) 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 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, "We call on citizens to continue taking anti-epidemic measures vigilantly and get vaccinated as early as possible, thereby minimising the potential threat of unstable epidemic activity from disrupting the resumption of social and economic activities. The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic development and adjust the social distancing measures in a timely manner, so as to gradually and orderly allow citizens' daily lives to resume normalcy under a stable epidemic situation."