

Law enforcement officers step up inspections on implementation of regulations in relation to social distancing

The Government today (April 6) urges members of the public to continue to support the temporary measures implemented by the Government to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community. They should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings, and maintain an appropriate social distance with other people in order to prevent the spread of epidemic.

The Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) have taken effect since March 28 and 29 respectively to regulate the business and operations of catering business and 12 categories of premises with relatively high risk of spreading the virus (scheduled premises); as well as to prohibit group gatherings with more than four people in public places. The Secretary for Food and Health had issued a number of directions according to the two regulations.

The Government spokesman said, "Maintaining social distancing is key to delay the spread of COVID-19 in Hong Kong. The enforcement departments have enhanced manpower to step up patrols in various public places, and remind the operators of the relevant premises and the public to comply with the requirements of the Regulations by verbal explanation, advice or warning. Fixed penalty tickets were also issued.

"During the past weekend (i.e. between 0.00am on April 4 and 0.00am on April 6), the Police issued fixed penalty tickets in accordance with Cap. 599G to six people who gathered and played chess at public places. In response to a 999 complaint from the public, the Police subsequently issued the fixed penalty tickets in accordance with the relevant Regulation. In addition, enforcement departments have conducted 4 114 inspections and gave 905 verbal warnings according to the Regulations over the same period."

According to the directions related to catering premises under Cap. 599F (including the latest direction issued by the Secretary for Food and Health to require bars and pubs to close for 14 days starting from April 3), the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) carried out 4 587 inspections and gave 175 verbal warnings. The Department of Health (DH) also conducted 40 inspections with two verbal warnings given. The Police made 562 inspections and issued 44 verbal warnings. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) also conducted 27 inspections.

With regard to the directions in relation to the scheduled premises,

FEHD, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, HAD and the Police carried out 54, 46, 27 and 28 inspections at the scheduled premises under their purview respectively.

The Government strongly urges members of the public to avoid going to those premises which may pose a relatively high risk of infection, and the relevant sectors should also make adjustments for the sake of public health, lowering the risk of infection of customers.

The Government reminds the persons responsible for carrying on the catering business and the managers of scheduled premises that contravening the requirements under Cap. 599F would be a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

On the other hand, according to Cap. 599G, anybody who participates in or organises a prohibited group gathering or owns, controls or operates the place of the gathering, and knowingly allows the gathering to take place, commits an offence. People who participate in a prohibited group gathering may be subject to a fixed penalty of \$2,000, while people who organise or allow a prohibited group gathering, if charged in a court, are liable to a maximum penalty of a \$25,000 fine and six months' imprisonment.

The DH will closely monitor the situation. Any updates will be issued through the media, the Government's "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html). Any enquiries on health information on COVID-19 may be addressed to the Centre for Health Protection's hotlines at 2125 1111 or 2125 1122 (operating daily from 8am to midnight).