

Members of public shall pay attention to social distancing during Easter holidays

During the coming four-day Easter holidays, the Government today (April 9) strongly urges members of the public to reduce social contact in order to protect the health of themselves, their families and others.

With a view to reducing the chance of contacting infected persons who may not present any symptoms and minimising the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community, they should:

- â– Stay at home as far as possible;
- â– Stay away from crowded places;
- â– Maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives and avoid social gatherings;
- â– Avoid shaking hands when meeting other people as well as avoid meal gatherings or banquets; and
- â– Postpone any unnecessary meetings or hold meetings by using video-conferencing/other remote communication technologies.

Moreover, some people may have plans for grave sweeping during holidays. The Government urges members of the public to seriously consider postponing such activities so as to protect themselves and their family members from being infected, thereby preventing the spread of the virus in the community.

A Government spokesman said, "The COVID-19 pandemic remains severe around the globe. As of 10am on April 9, the number of confirmed cases reported globally had exceeded 1.4 million. Meanwhile, the number of local confirmed cases as at noon on April 9 had reached 974 (including one probable case), a drastic increase from the number of 454 confirmed cases a fortnight ago. Many of the cases were locally acquired infections without travel history. Hong Kong remains under a public health emergency situation.

'To minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the community, we all need to work together to step up efforts on social distancing. The measures taken by the Government to achieve this include: suspension of classes; work-from-home arrangement for some civil servants; suspension of some public services; and cancellation of Government events."

With an aim to reducing social contact, the Government has put in place the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) to regulate the business and operation of catering business and the premises with relatively high risk of spreading the virus (scheduled premises); as well as prohibit group gatherings with more than four people in public places. The Secretary for Food and Health had earlier issued notices to specify the

relevant requirements. A summary of the notices is at Annex.

The relevant enforcement agencies will conduct inspections and take enforcement actions at various public places as usual during the public holidays, appealing members of the public and the operators of the relevant premises to comply with the requirements of the notices.

Under Cap. 599F, it would be a criminal offence if the persons responsible for carrying on the catering business and the managers of scheduled premises contravene the requirements. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

As at 0.00am this morning, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Police, had initiated three prosecutions to premises suspected of contravening the directions relating to catering business under Cap. 599F. The FEHD, the Department of Health (DH), the Police and the Home Affairs Department (HAD) had conducted 32 141 inspections and issued 1 813 verbal warnings. Regarding the directions relating to scheduled premises, the FEHD, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), HAD and the Police had conducted 2 189 inspections and issued 24 verbal warnings to premises under their purview.

In addition, Cap. 599G stipulates that any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of the gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of the gathering, commits an offence. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months. Persons who participate in a prohibited group gathering may be liable to a fixed penalty of \$2,000.

As at 0.00am this morning, the Police, in accordance with Cap. 599G, had issued 25 fixed penalty tickets to persons participating in group gatherings at public places. DH, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the LCSD, the Housing Department, the HAD, the FEHD and the Police had conducted 17 909 inspections and issued 2 213 verbal warnings under the regulation.

The spokesman said, "Currently, the pandemic remains severe around the globe. Letting our guard down at this critical moment might worsen the situation in Hong Kong. Therefore, we sincerely hope members of the public will cooperate and fight against the virus together."

In order to work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs,

or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;

- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

Members of the public can visit the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for the latest updates on various news and health advice to grasp the latest information.