

Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation

Maintaining social distancing is key to delay the spread of COVID-19 in Hong Kong. The Government will publish the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (the Regulation) (Cap.599G) in the Gazette today (March 28), with a view to combating the COVID-19 epidemic with resolute and stringent measures. The Regulation will commence at 0.00am on March 29 and take effect for three months.

In accordance with the Regulation, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) will issue a notice in the Gazette today to prohibit group gatherings with more than four people in public places, which will take effect at 0.00am on March 29 for 14 days.

The Regulation empowers the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH), for preventing, protecting against, delaying or otherwise controlling the incidence or transmission of the specified disease, to prohibit any group gathering of more than 4 persons in any public place during a specified period.

Exempted group gatherings are listed in the Schedule 1 to the Regulation –

1. Group gathering for the purposes of or related to transportation
2. Group gathering for performing any governmental function
3. Group gathering for performing any duty of a statutory body or an advisory body of the Government
4. Group gathering at a place of work for the purposes of work
5. Group gathering for providing, obtaining or receiving hospital or healthcare service at a healthcare facility
6. Group gathering of persons living in the same household
7. Group gathering necessary for the conduct of proceedings in a court, magistrates' court or tribunal
8. Group gathering necessary for the proceedings in the Legislative Council or a District Council
9. Group gathering during a funeral or any other occasion for mourning for or remembering a deceased who has yet to be buried or cremated (including any ritual or ceremony held in the vicinity of the place where the deceased died or suffered fatal injury to mourn for the death of the deceased)
10. Group gathering of not more than 20 persons during a wedding ceremony at which no food or drink is served
11. Group gathering at a meeting of a body that must be held within a specified period in order to comply with any Ordinance or other regulatory instrument that governs the operation of the body or its

business

12. Group gathering held for imparting information or skills, or handling supplies or items, that are conducive to the prevention and control of the specified disease

Moreover, the Regulation also empowers the Chief Secretary for Administration to permit any group gathering if the Chief Secretary for Administration is satisfied that the taking place of the gathering –

- (a) is necessary for governmental operation; or
- (b) because of the exceptional circumstances of the case, otherwise serves the public interest of Hong Kong.

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 penalty of a fine at level 4 (\$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.

The Director of Health may appoint any public officer as an authorised officer for the purposes of implementing the Regulation. The authorised officer may demand personal details and inspect the proof of identity as well as disperse prohibited group gatherings.

In accordance with the Regulation, the SFH will issue a notice in the Gazette today. The prohibition of group gatherings with more than four people in public places will commence at 0.00am on March 29 for a period of 14 days (i.e. till April 11).

The Government has been reviewing and will adjust relevant measures and their feasibility in view of the latest developments. A Government spokesman said that putting in place the Regulation could help further enhance social distancing and prevent mass gatherings. When making the Regulation, the Government has taken into account the activities and premises/places with high risks of COVID-19 infection, as well as overseas practices.

The Regulation is made in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599). Section 8 of the Ordinance empowers the Chief Executive in Council to make public health emergency regulation for the purposes of preventing, combating or alleviating the effects of a public health emergency and protecting public health.

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) reminds members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings.

The CHP strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict

personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

The Department of Health 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) and the DH's webpage (www.gov.hk/ncv). Any enquiries on health information on COVID-19 may be addressed to the DH's hotline at (852) 2125 1122 (operating daily from 8am to midnight).

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CHP investigates 65 additional cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 4pm today (March 27), the CHP is investigating 65 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19, taking the number of cases to 519 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 518 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Moreover, the DH has further extended its Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme this evening to provide free testing for COVID-19 to asymptomatic inbound travellers arriving from the Philippines and Indonesia. Specimen collection containers will be provided to these travellers at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) for collection of their deep throat

saliva samples for testing.

The DH has set up a Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at the AsiaWorld-Expo (TSCC) to speed up the collection of specimen from inbound travellers from overseas for conducting testing for COVID-19, and facilitate those who have difficulty in arranging family members or friends to submit their specimen during home quarantine.

The DH urges the relevant inbound travellers to proceed to the TSCC immediately from the HKIA. They should provide their deep throat saliva sample in accordance with the instructions and submit it to the DH personnel on duty at the TSCC, so that the relevant virus testing can be arranged by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch as soon as possible.

Those travellers who opt to collect their own deep throat saliva sample during home quarantine should do so at the earliest opportunity and ask their family members or friends deliver it to any of the collection points in the same morning. The collection points are 13 designated chest clinics or dermatological clinics under the DH from 9am to 11am on Monday to Sunday and also some General Out-patient clinics under the Hospital Authority from 8.30am to 9.30am on Monday to Friday (except public holiday).

The newly reported cases announced today involve 28 males and 37 females aged between 12 and 71. Among them, 41 had travel history during the incubation period. The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

For information on flights that patients of the confirmed cases have taken, please refer to the following webpage: (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/flights_trains_en.pdf). Passengers who travelled on the same flights and sat within two seats surrounding those patients are urged to call the CHP hotlines 2125 1111 and 2125 1122.

The CHP urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons, who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

In particular, the CHP reminded those who have returned to Hong Kong from overseas or visited overseas before the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) took effect on March 19 that, although they are not subject to the 14-day compulsory quarantine, they should stay home and avoid going out as far as possible for 14 days. They should wear surgical mask, maintain stringent personal hygiene as a measure to protect themselves and their family members. They should seek medical advice as soon as possible if symptoms develop to safeguard the health of themselves, family and friends as well as the general public.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "In view of proliferation of the disease and continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong."

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes."

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps); cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use; after using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

The CHP will report the cases to the World Health Organization, National Health Commission, Health Commission of Guangdong Province, relevant health authorities and the Hospital Authority.

The CHP has set up the hotlines (2125 1111 and 2125 1122), which operate from 8am to midnight daily, for public enquiries. As at 4pm today, a total of 62 258 calls were received.

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on the COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, 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 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 liter of water into each drain outlet (U-traps) 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.

Transcript of remarks of press conference

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this evening (March 27). Also joining were the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Ms Elizabeth Tse; and the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene, Miss Vivian Lau. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam, so after the U-turn of your alcohol ban, so what confidence should the community have that your Government will not change its stance on these other measures you just announced tomorrow? You said you just raised a suggestion on Monday but your wording on Monday was more like an announcement. So has something gone wrong in the decision-making process? The second question, on the timetable of announcing such series of measures, don't you think the Government has been slow and indecisive in taking these drastic measures to contain the surge? And finally, questions on the estimates of residents returning from overseas. As overseas epidemic situation has further worsened, what are the contingency plans? And right now the arrivals from the Mainland do not need to wear wristbands, and what's your response on calls from experts that tougher measures should be put on them? Thank you.

Chief Executive: There are three questions. One is whenever a government policy requires legislative backup, that piece of legislation has to be enacted with the approval of the Legislative Council upon the endorsement of the Executive Council. So it is not entirely correct to say that there has been a decision making in enacting a piece of legislation to ban the consumption and supply of alcoholic drinks in bars or restaurants. That particular proposal has not reached that stage. That proposal was floated by me, of course having discussed internally within the Government, as a means to enhance social distancing, as a result of the large number of confirmed cases arising from customers gathering in bars, particularly in a location in Hong Kong. I'm very pleased that upon our suggestion, there have been very

extensive discussions and active debate in society on whether that particular measure was an effective one. The consensus is perhaps any measure to tackle the issue of infection should not be focused on a particular sector or particular setting, but the crux of the matter is to reduce social interactions as far as possible. So today we are announcing with the endorsement of the Executive Council a piece of subsidiary legislation in order to achieve that objective. Any gatherings of four persons or more will be prohibited, unless it has been specifically exempted under that piece of regulation.

As far as your second question, I think the best way to look at the effectiveness of the Hong Kong SAR Government's various measures over the past two and three months is to look at the incidence of infection in Hong Kong as well as the absolute cases. Yes, we are very worried by the surge in cases in Hong Kong, especially a record-breaking 65 cases today, but if you look at the comparison, Hong Kong ranks very low when compared to other countries in terms of both the absolute numbers and also the incidence of infection per one million population. I wouldn't say that this is entirely the credit or the results of government intervention. That is also the collective efforts of the people of Hong Kong. But certainly what we have done at various stages – almost on a weekly basis and a daily basis we have been making announcements, introducing measures and enacting at least four pieces of new regulations – all these efforts point to the direction of trying to contain the spread of this virus.

As far as the third question about returnees from overseas, the first question we need to answer is: do we allow them to come back? The answer has to be yes, because these are Hong Kong residents. They enjoy the right to enter and exit Hong Kong under the Basic Law, which is a constitutional as well as a human right for the people of Hong Kong. We have to enable them to come in. Allowing them to come in but at the same time trying to contain the virus is a major challenge, because all these Hong Kong people returning apparently are from highly infectious places. If you look at the numbers, I think Hong Kong students studying in the United Kingdom have already clocked up over 30 confirmed cases. The response is really to ask for their co-operation to subject themselves to the compulsory 14-day quarantine at home, to respect the monitoring measures that we have put in place, like the wristbands and this location-sharing service, and also to participate in the test that we have introduced. And we will enhance the test as Secretary Sophia Chan has outlined to you.

As far as Mainland arrivals, there are now very, very few Mainland arrivals after all these measures have been put in place. I suppose you are referring to the second batch of returnees of Hong Kong people from Hubei. Is that right?

Reporter: Yeah ...

Chief Executive: From Hubei?

Reporter: ... and also the daily ...

Chief Executive: There isn't any daily. Secretary Lee could give you the figures about Mainlanders coming in. As far as the Hubei returnees, according to the experts, their risk is much lower than the returnees from highly infectious places overseas and we have to be very pragmatic and realistic. All the things that we are now using in this anti-epidemic work are in short supply. Hospital beds, especially isolation beds, are in short supply. Quarantine centres are in short supply. Quarantine camps are in short supply. Medication, perhaps sooner or later, will be in short supply. Wristbands are in short supply. Staff are in short supply. We have to be very realistic and find a way forward in order to make the full use of our short supply of resources in order to achieve the objective on a sustainable basis, because I don't know how long this will last, especially we still have quite a large number of Hong Kong people coming back by air. The earlier arrangement is for the Hubei returnees, since they are of lower risk, to be put on another form of monitoring, which is the apps for location sharing, which is far more convenient for returnees from Mainland because I think many of them will have this WeChat service. But as far as other monitoring measures, they are the same. We are as vigilant as we could in ensuring that people coming back to Hong Kong will not cause more spread of the virus in Hong Kong. Thank you.

Reporter: ... estimates of the returnees from overseas?

Chief Executive: Don't know. There are so many people abroad. You can only estimate on the basis of flights, how many flights there are every day coming back from overseas.

Reporter: Good evening, Mrs Lam. Why is the Government not enacting a full curfew and closing restaurants like other countries? Is the Government putting, you know, business first? Second, Beijing is claiming each day that they have no new domestic cases. As some people return to Hong Kong from China and with borders, you know, set in the future to be relaxed, do you have 100 per cent trust in the accuracy of Beijing's epidemic data? And this one isn't about the virus but it's quite urgent – we know of US journalists set to be ousted this week from China who also have Hong Kong permanent residency. How can they be barred from journalism here? The Immigration Department has nothing to do with their cases. Will Hong Kong defy Beijing on this or somehow tell a permanent resident that they can't work a certain job?

Chief Executive: There are a few questions. I'll try to answer them and perhaps the Secretary for Security could supplement if needed. First is in the course of rolling out anti-epidemic measures, we are guided by the advice from the experts on the expert advisory panels. The most important advice given to me over the last few days is really on enhancing social distancing. But we are also very aware that Hong Kong needs to continue because there are a lot of normal operations, activities that need to continue, just like we still need goods trucks coming into Hong Kong, bringing Hong Kong the food and daily necessities that we need. It's not a question of putting which sector's interest above which sector's interest. We are acting in the overall public interest of Hong Kong.

As far as the situation in Mainland, I think everybody is fully aware that the situation has stabilised. If not because of the imported cases, there would be no more cases in the Mainland. That's why the Mainland authorities, like Hong Kong authorities, are now very worried of importation of cases from abroad. And you might have picked up already from today, Guangdong has also imposed certain quarantine arrangements on arrivals from Hong Kong and Macao into Guangdong. Whether the Mainland situation or statistics could be trusted, I will refer you to what the WHO has said about the situation.

As far as the immigration matters, we will act in accordance with the law. As I've mentioned, we cannot deny the entry of Hong Kong residents, despite they coming back from highly infectious places. It's exactly because of the law and the constitutional and human rights of these people. In all individual cases about foreigners coming in and other things, we will act in strict accordance with the law.

Reporter:...

Chief Executive: What's your question? I've answered four questions.

Reporter: About the journalism. Permanent residents who may be barred from journalism in Hong Kong?

Chief Executive: We will be acting in accordance with the law.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation gazetted

The Government published in the Gazette today (March 27) the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (the Regulation) (Cap. 599F) to implement temporary measures to address the current situation of public health emergency. The Regulation will commence at 0.00 am tomorrow (March 28) and will take effect for three months.

Meanwhile, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) issues two directions for 14 days through a notice published in the Gazette in accordance with the Regulation. The directions will take effect at 6pm on March 28.

Specific measures of the Regulation cover the following two aspects:

1. Catering Business

The Regulation empowers the SFH, for preventing, protecting against, delaying or otherwise controlling the incidence or transmission of the specified disease, to issue requirements and directions in relation to catering business, including –

(a) Requiring catering business premises to cease selling or supplying food or drinks for on-site consumption, and to close whole or part of the premises where food or drink is sold or supplied

This restriction applies to restaurants, canteens, cafes, eateries, pubs, bars, etc. but does not cover a catering business carried on at private dwellings, or operating in hospitals and institutions, etc. The affected premises are still allowed to sell or supply food and/or drink for takeaway and deliveries. The Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) may exempt certain catering business premises from the requirements.

(b) Restricting the operation of catering business

The mode of operation carried on at the premises of the business (including but not be limited to specifying the permitted capacity for conducting business in the premises, the distance requirement for individuals in the premises, etc.) or the daily opening hours of the business are restricted.

The requirements are only effective through a notice made by the SFH published in the Gazette and each of the specified period must not exceed 14 days.

The person responsible for carrying on the catering business (i.e. the owner, proprietor and manager) commits an offence if he or she fails to comply with the above requirements. Offences would attract a fine at level 5, i.e. \$50,000, and imprisonment for six months, which is the maximum penalty the Regulation may provide pursuant to section 8 of Cap. 599.

2. Scheduled Premises

In addition to catering business, the Regulation also empowers the SFH to issue directions to scheduled premises, including closing the scheduled premises for a specified period. Scheduled premises include amusement game centres, bathhouses, fitness centres, places of amusement, places of public entertainment and any premises that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings (commonly known as "party room").

The requirements are only effective through a notice made by SFH published in the Gazette and each of the specified period must not exceed 14 days. The person responsible for the management of the scheduled premises commits an offence if he or she fails to comply with the requirements. Offences would attract a fine at level 5, i.e. \$50,000, and

imprisonment for six months, which is the maximum penalty the Regulation may provide pursuant to section 8 of Cap. 599.

Latest directions issued by the SFH in accordance with the Regulation

SFH now issues the following two directions through notice in the Gazette in accordance with the Regulation. The directions will commence at March 28 at 6pm for a period of 14 days (i.e. till 5.59pm on April 11). Details of the two directions are set out below:

Direction 1 – Catering Business

The relevant requirements include:

- (a) the number of customers at any premises on which food or drink is sold or supplied for consumption on the premises (catering premises) at any one time must not exceed 50% of the normal seating capacity of the premises;
- (b) 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 some form of partition which could serve as effective buffer between one table and another table at the premises;
- (c) no more than 4 persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises;
- (d) a person must wear a mask at any time within any catering premises, except when the person is consuming food or drink on the premises;
- (e) body temperature screening on a person must be conducted before the person is allowed to enter the catering premises; and
- (f) hand sanitisers must be provided at any catering premises for any person at the premises.

Direction 2 – Scheduled Premises

All premises as listed below must be closed –

- (a) Amusement game centres;
- (b) Bathhouses;
- (c) Fitness centres;
- (d) Places of amusement;
- (e) Places of public entertainment; and
- (f) Premises that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings (commonly known as "party room").

A spokesperson for the Food and Health Bureau reminded the persons responsible for carrying on the catering business and the managers of scheduled premises that contravening the above requirements would be a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The spokesperson said that the Government has been reviewing the feasibility of relevant measures and will make adjustments on a timely basis in view of the latest development of the disease. Putting in place the Regulation could help further enhance social distancing. When making the

Regulation, the Government has taken into account the activities and premises / places with higher infection risks of COVID-19, as well as overseas practices.

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The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear surgical masks when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

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