

Coronavirus pandemic

# 897 new cases and 9 new virus clusters identified

New S'porean, PR infections at lowest since March 29; number of unlinked cases down

Aw Cheng Wei

There were nine new Covid-19 clusters announced yesterday as the total number of cases in Singapore crossed 12,000 – even as small positive signs started to emerge.

The number of Singaporeans and permanent residents (PRs) confirmed being infected yesterday was the lowest since March 29, when 13 patients were reported to be infected. Together with the 12 work pass holders who tested positive, there were 25 new cases in the community announced yesterday.

The Ministry of Health noted that the number of unlinked cases in the community has decreased to a daily average of 17 cases in the past week, down from a daily average of 20 cases in the week before.

The nine new clusters include the Natureland East Coast spa at 907 East Coast Road and The Strand Hotel at 25 Bencoolen Street, as well as several more dormitories. The spa was linked to six earlier confirmed cases, while the hotel was linked to five new cases.

The Agency for Integrated Care said that one of the cases confirmed yesterday is a 21-year-old healthcare assistant at All Saints Home (Hougang). The assistant was last at work on Tuesday.

It added that the nursing home has been thoroughly cleaned and affected areas disinfected as part of additional precautionary measures.

"Contact tracing is ongoing, and those who had close contact with the confirmed case will be quarantined," the agency said.

There was also a new case in the public healthcare sector – a 43-year-old nurse who works at Bukit Merah Polyclinic. She reported having Covid-19 symptoms on Monday, and has not been to work since.

Foreign workers staying in dormitories continue to make up the bulk of new coronavirus cases, with 853 such workers among the 897 new cases yesterday, the ministry said in its daily update. There are now 9,929 foreign workers from dorms diagnosed with Covid-19, or about 3 per cent of the 323,000 foreign worker dorm residents here.

The total number of cases in Singapore as of noon yesterday is 12,075.

Foreign workers not staying in dorms made up 19 of the new cases. The number of new cases among this group has continued to increase to a daily average of 28 cases in the past week, up from a daily average of 19 cases from the week before.

There were no imported cases reported yesterday. The last imported case was identified on April 17.

Yesterday, the ministry also provided more information on the 46-year-old construction worker from India who was found motionless at a staircase landing at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital on Thursday morning.

The ministry said that the worker had died because of multiple injuries consistent with those resulting from a fall from height, and not because of complications from Covid-19.

A further 38 people were discharged yesterday, bringing the total for those who have recovered to 956. Twelve people have died from complications arising from Covid-19.

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Sarimbun Scout Camp in Lim Chu Kang, one of the premises being used to house foreign workers. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



Foreign workers are also staying at the MOE Dairy Farm Outdoor Adventure Learning Centre, near Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHING



A dormitory block at the Home Team Academy in Old Choa Chu Kang Road where foreign workers in essential services are staying. PHOTO: HOME TEAM ACADEMY



Foreign workers had to register before moving to their temporary accommodation at Jurong Camp II. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



Two cruise ships including the SuperStar Gemini (above) were being assessed for their feasibility to house healthy foreign workers. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

# Freeing up bed space in hospitals

Covid-19 patients with mild or no symptoms have been progressively transferred to private and community hospitals, as well as community isolation facilities, since a month ago. Patients in such facilities now make up almost 90 per cent of those who are still infected. Straits Times journalist **Rei Kurohi** looks at these facilities.



Left: The Changi Exhibition Centre has been repurposed to house recovering or early Covid-19 patients with mild symptoms, and can hold around 2,800 patients. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO



Below: The isolation facility at D'Resort NTUC in Pasir Ris. PHOTO: LIANHE ZHAOBAO



Above: The community isolation facility at the Singapore Expo. Right: Four vacant Housing Board blocks in Taman Jurong were refurbished to house foreign workers in essential services. PHOTOS: MINISTRY OF HEALTH, KHALID BABA



### Accommodation spaces set aside

A facility being built at Tanjong Pagar Terminal is the latest to be prepared to house Covid-19 patients or foreign workers.

#### EXISTING FACILITIES INCLUDE:

- Community isolation facilities
- D'Resort NTUC in Pasir Ris (500 people)
- Singapore Expo (950 people for two halls, with another four due to open progressively)
- Changi Exhibition Centre (2,800 people)
- More than 10 private and community hospitals

#### Housing for foreign workers

- Jurong Camp II and Bedok Camp II (1,300 people)
- 21 vacant Housing Board blocks in Bukit Merah
- Four vacant "diamond" HDB blocks in Taman Jurong (456 units)
- Three floating accommodation facilities at Tanjong Pagar Terminal (1,300 people)
- Home Team Academy and Civil Defence Academy (700 people)
- Northshore Primary School in Punggol North
- Outdoor Adventure Learning Centres in Dairy Farm and Labrador
- Sarimbun Scout Camp in Lim Chu Kang

#### OTHER FACILITIES BEING CONSIDERED

- SuperStar Aquarius cruise ship
- SuperStar Gemini cruise ship

# More patients being placed face down to improve oxygen flow

Timothy Goh

Patients lying face down on their stomachs in hospital beds have needed less oxygen support than those lying on their backs.

The discovery has prompted some healthcare institutions here, including the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), to place more of their patients in the prone position.

Respiratory and critical care medicine consultant Puah Ser Hon declined to provide specific numbers when speaking to The Straits Times on Thursday, but said that

"significantly more" Covid-19 patients at the centre are now lying on their stomachs.

Dr Puah, who is with Tan Tock Seng Hospital, looks after patients in NCID's intensive care unit (ICU).

The facility, which was built to strengthen Singapore's capabilities in infectious diseases management and prevention, has had more than 1,900 Covid-19 patients since the disease began spreading here on Jan 23.

Dr Puah said the NCID made the move after increasing anecdotal evidence showed that putting Covid-19 patients in the prone position helps improve their oxygen flow.

"We are seeing quite a remarkable change in their oxygen levels. When they are lying down on their backs, the very severe and sick cases require quite a lot of oxygen support.

"But when we put them in the prone position, (these) requirements do come down," he explained.

Pneumonia caused by Covid-19 often results in damage to patches of the patients' lungs, while other parts of the lungs remain in good condition.

Dr Puah said pus and other fluids may build up in the damaged areas and, as people naturally tend to lie on their backs when they are resting, the back of such patients' lungs

tends to get inflamed.

This makes it difficult for oxygen to be exchanged there, and results in breathlessness and other complications.

However, when patients are in the prone position, blood is naturally redistributed because of gravity, allowing it to reach the parts of the lungs that are still in good condition.

The body can then process the oxygen that the blood carries.

Dr Puah said international trials have shown that it is beneficial to put Covid-19 patients in the prone position for about 16 hours a day, before turning them over to rest on their backs.

This is because lying on one's stomach puts pressure on other body parts, and cannot be done for too long.

He added that there is a lot of ongoing research on the benefits of putting patients in the prone position, and that more time is needed to tell whether it will aid in the overall recovery of Covid-19 patients.

One immediate benefit remains clear – it helps such patients feel less breathless and reduces the amount of oxygen support they need.

Dr Puah said that the prone position is also being tried out on non-ICU patients in NCID.

However, he cautioned that this should not be taken as a blanket recommendation for all sick people to lie on their stomachs, and that the position is suitable only for patients who meet certain criteria.

This would include those whose bodies have trouble processing oxygen, and who do not have heart, back, spinal or blood pressure issues. It also does not have any implications on the sleeping position of healthy people.

"It is best to leave it up to health professionals to decide when it is needed, when one is unwell," he said.

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Dr Nikhil Gautam, a resident physician at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, placing a Covid-19 patient into the prone position in the intensive care unit's isolation room on Tuesday. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

### Deep breathing, stretching exercises not prescribed for Covid-19 patients

Videos have been circulating online extolling the benefits of deep breathing and stretching exercises in fighting the coronavirus infection.

But respiratory and critical care medicine consultant Puah Ser Hon, who looks after patients at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases' intensive care unit, said his team does not tailor such exercises for Covid-19 patients.

One video shows a doctor telling patients to take five deep breaths, holding their breath for five seconds each time.

They are then told to take a sixth deep breath and cough, be-

fore repeating the entire process. Patients are then advised to lie on the bed and take slightly deeper breaths for the next 10 minutes.

About the only advice from the various videos that has some support from experts is the point about staying active.

Dr Puah noted that remaining active – while not overtraining oneself – is important in beating any disease, as long periods of being bed-bound can weaken the muscles in a person's body.

He said: "If you were a marathon runner who ran a couple of marathons, then you fell sick and decided not to run

marathons for two years, you would find yourself unable to hit that pace again.

"Similarly, if... all you do is lie in bed for the next two weeks to four weeks, all your muscles will definitely become (weaker). This is especially so for older folk, who will probably need a lot more physical therapy and rehabilitation to get them back to their original physical state."

He added: "We are not asking you to go and do high-intensity interval training when you are sick, but just don't be too bed-bound."

Timothy Goh