

Coronavirus Singapore

Staff with ART positive result must self-isolate and work from home

Sarafana Shafeeq

Those who test positive on a Covid-19 antigen rapid test (ART) must self-isolate and work from home even if they are physically well.

If their job does not allow them to work from home, employers must treat the period of absence as paid sick leave, the tripartite partners – the Ministry of Manpower, the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation – said in an advisory yesterday.

Employees who test positive via an ART but are physically well are advised to self-isolate at home for

72 hours, and then do another ART test. If the result is negative, they are allowed to come back to work.

If they test positive, they should continue to self-isolate and take another ART every 24 hours until they receive a negative result.

There is no need for those who test positive to go to a clinic to take a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test if they have no symptoms, unless they are in a vulnerable or high-risk group. "Such individuals are advised to self-isolate to monitor their health, instead of rushing to the nearest general practitioner clinic or hospital, which may risk exposure to other infections," the tripartite partners said.

"This is a risk-calibrated approach that will allow Singapore

to focus the use of primary care and other healthcare resources on Covid-19 patients at higher risk of falling severely ill."

Some individuals are still required to undergo PCR testing if they are ART positive – even if they are physically well. These are those working in healthcare, eldercare and in pre-schools or primary schools. This also applies to young children in pre-school or primary school.

The same goes for those under a quarantine order or stay-home notice, those who have received a health risk warning via SMS, vaccinated seniors above the age of 80 and unvaccinated seniors above the age of 70.

Every employee in Singapore who has at least three months of service is entitled to up to 60 days of paid sick leave, including hospitalisation leave.

Employers should exercise compassion and flexibility in supporting the needs of their employees if they do not have enough paid sick leave to cover their isolation period, the advisory said.

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Parents not allowed on pre-school premises amid tighter measures

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Regardless of vaccination status, parents of pre-schoolers will not be allowed to enter school premises from tomorrow, said the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA).

On Friday, the agency announced stricter Covid-19 measures to slow the spread of infections in the community.

Until Oct 24, only visitors required to support the running of pre-schools and those who are needed to perform necessary functions, such as contractors and licensing officers, may enter the premises.

More people will also be placed on leave of absence to ring-fence potential transmission and minimise the formation of large clusters in pre-schools, said ECDA.

It noted that many of the cases in pre-schools so far have arisen due to household transmissions.

Tighter restrictions will now apply to children or staff whose household members aged six and above are experiencing fever or flu-like symptoms, such as cough, runny nose, sore throat and shortness of breath.

The child or staff member will be allowed to return to the pre-school only after the unwell household member tests negative for Covid-19 with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test or an antigen

rapid test (ART). Children and staff with household members who test positive with an ART will also be placed on leave of absence. They can return only after the household member has tested negative with a PCR test or an ART.

Those on quarantine orders may return to school only on Day 11 from the date of last exposure to a Covid-19 case, provided that they test negative in their exit swab.

They will have to do ART daily from days 11 to 14. Children who are unable to undergo these daily self-tests can return to pre-school only after Day 14.

Those who test positive on an ART, regardless of symptoms, should visit a Swab and Send Home clinic immediately and take a PCR test. These people will be allowed to return only after receiving a negative PCR test and when they no longer display symptoms.

ECDA said it will also automatically waive the minimum attendance requirement for pre-school subsidies this month and next month.

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Physiotherapy helped Covid-19 survivor regain his lost strength

After 2 weeks in ICU, he was so weak he couldn't get out of bed or brush his teeth without help

Clara Chong

About four months ago, Mr Sathish Kumar was in the intensive care unit (ICU) at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, intubated and fighting for his life, having contracted Covid-19.

The 52-year-old engineer survived the ordeal and was moved from the ICU after about two weeks.

But he was so weak that he could not get out of bed to go to the toilet or brush his teeth without help.

He was nursed back to health, thanks to the medical team at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

The physiotherapists first saw him on May 25 – the day he was discharged from the ICU – and taught him some simple exercises. Mr Sathish said in an interview on Thursday that these were critical in helping him regain the strength he lost after being confined to a hospital bed for weeks.

Many Covid-19 survivors require physiotherapy as part of their recovery. The TTSH physiotherapy team has seen more than 400 recovered Covid-19 patients since the start of the pandemic last year.

Healthy patients with mild forms of Covid-19 might need just a few sessions, while more severely ill patients might need a few months of rehabilitation. Exercises are tailored to what each individual needs.

Following Mr Sathish's discharge from the ICU, he had to work on lifting his arms and legs, activating the muscles that allowed him to move around. His physiotherapists saw him once a day.

As his oxygen levels were low at first, they had to be closely monitored, along with his heart rate. Sometimes he needed oxygen, which can be low among recovering patients, during exercise.

As his health slowly improved, he was taught how to stand and do slow marching exercises on the spot. Breathing exercises, such as how to relax and breathe deeply, were also critical.

Mr Sathish was diagnosed with Covid-19 early in May when he returned from a visit to India to see his mother. His condition deteriorated and he was moved to the ICU on May 12. He was discharged from hospital on June 9.

Since then, Mr Sathish has been diligent about doing his exercises and has seen his health improve to close to his pre-Covid-19 state. He does his exercises twice a day – in the morning and after work.

The exercises are simple, such as push-ups against the wall, lifting light weights and marching on the spot. Mr Sathish has diabetes as a pre-existing condition.

Dr Puah Ser Hon, a consultant in respiratory and critical care medicine at TTSH who was on Mr Sathish's care team, said that Mr



Sathish's recovery is considered good, given that he had developed a serious form of Covid-19 and needed invasive mechanical ventilation.

"Most patients have a recovery like Mr Sathish's. But if patients take a turn for the worse while in ICU, such as if they develop multi-organ failure or require more lung support, then they may stay longer in the ICU or die," Dr Puah said.

Currently, Mr Sathish returns to TTSH as an outpatient for structured physiotherapy sessions once every three weeks.

He has gone back to work and is able to travel around independently, but some residual symptoms continue to linger.

He still tires more easily and occasionally experiences breathing difficulties.

The father of two children said: "Even though this is a serious infection and I had to go through a hard time, I am really thankful to everyone in the medical team, including the physiotherapists, doctors and nurses, for their support. If not for them, I wouldn't have been able to come out of this ordeal and have a new lease of life."

Ms Audrey Lee, a senior physiotherapist at TTSH, said: "Starting rehabilitation early, even when a patient is still in the ICU, is beneficial and helps patients recover faster."

This debunks the conventional wisdom that rest is the best way to recover quickly.

"Over the years, research has shown us that early rehabilitation



Top and above: Physiotherapist Javier Luo assisting Mr Sathish Kumar, 52, with some of the prescribed exercises to strengthen the muscles in his arms and legs at Tan Tock Seng Hospital on Tuesday. Mr Sathish goes there for structured physiotherapy sessions once every three weeks. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

by physiotherapists actually helps the patient feel better and go home faster," Ms Lee said.

With more Singaporeans being infected with the virus and in conjunction with World Physiotherapy Day on Sept 8, the TTSH physiotherapy department has produced two exercise booklets containing strengthening, endurance and balance exercises, for patients who have recovered from Covid-19 to reduce any lingering symptoms, and for the general public.

"With more Singaporeans getting infected with Covid-19, a majority of them might be otherwise healthy, have no medical issues and do not need hospital care. This group of people can practise these exercises at home now that the booklets are available on the TTSH website," Ms Lee said.

She added that patients with medical conditions should always consult their doctors to determine what kind of exercises are suitable for them.

"Many have the misconception that they can exercise only outdoors, but in fact, exercises can be done within their own home and staying home does not necessarily mean they have to be inactive."

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• The exercise booklets – Keep It Fit At Home! A Home Exercise Programme After Discharge and Exercise: Get Active! – can be downloaded at www.ttsh.com.sg/Patients-and-Visitors/Pages/Health-Library.aspx

EARLY REHAB AIDS RECOVERY

Starting rehabilitation early, even when a patient is still in the ICU, is beneficial and helps patients recover faster. Over the years, research has shown us that early rehabilitation by physiotherapists actually helps the patient feel better and go home faster.



MS AUDREY LEE, a senior physiotherapist at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, on research debunking the conventional wisdom that rest is the best way to recover quickly.

> 400

Number of recovered Covid-19 patients the Tan Tock Seng Hospital physiotherapy team has seen since the start of the pandemic last year.