

Must-reads

THE BIG STORY
Plans unveiled for S'pore's post-pandemic economy

A post-coronavirus Singapore is one that breaks new ground in the digital space to offer unlimited opportunities for its businesses and people, and collaborates closely with them to be sustainable and stronger together. This is the vision put forward by the Emerging Stronger Taskforce for Singapore's post-pandemic economy. A1

THE BIG STORY
Air travel bubble between S'pore, HK delayed again

The air travel bubble to allow for quarantine-free travel between Singapore and Hong Kong will be delayed again, after a spike in Covid-19 cases here. Both cities agreed to defer the launch of the initiative to protect the health of travellers and the public in these two places, the Ministry of Transport said. A4

**WORLD**
Covid-19 cases hit new daily high in Thailand

Thailand saw its single biggest daily spike in Covid-19 cases yesterday, stemming largely from outbreaks in its overcrowded prisons. The record number of infections came just as the Thai government allowed dining in at restaurants, with up to 25 per cent their capacity, in the most-affected provinces from yesterday. A12



Coronavirus: Singapore

Singapore Poly and NIE students, NSF among 11 new unlinked community cases

Ng Wei Kai

Two more students at Singapore Polytechnic (SP) have tested positive for Covid-19.

The first is a 16-year-old boy who has tested positive for the B1617 variant of the virus first identified in India, while the second is a 32-year-old IT engineer enrolled as a part-time adult learner.

This has prompted the polytechnic to move all lessons online for the next two weeks from Tuesday May 18 to Friday May 28, it said in a statement last night.

The two cases are currently not connected and were two of 11 unlinked cases reported yesterday.

The others included a student at the National Institute of Education (NIE) who is also a part-time tutor and a full-time national serviceman (NSF), said the Ministry of Health (MOH).

The NSF was last at Sungei Gedong Camp on May 14, and is currently warded at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, said the Ministry of Defence in a statement last night.

He had received both doses of a Covid-19 vaccine.

The two SP students' positive tests come after an 18-year-old from SP's Media, Arts and Design School tested positive on Saturday.

A 37-year-old teacher at Frontier Primary and an eight-year-old boy at Fuchun Primary have

also tested positive for the virus, prompting their schools to shift to home-based learning two days earlier than the rest of Singapore's schools.

The teacher's infection is unlinked, while the boy's has been linked to the Changi Airport cluster. Three other patients reported yesterday were linked to this group. They are a 37-year-old foreign domestic worker, a 63-year-old housewife and a 49-year-old Certis Cisco security officer.

There were six other linked cases for a total of 10, the Ministry of Health said in a statement last night.

Of these, one - a 62-year-old retired man - has been linked to the cluster related to Wok Hey in

White Sands Shopping Mall. There are now four cases in this cluster.

As a few Covid-19 patients had visited White Sands while infectious, MOH will be offering free Covid-19 testing for members of the public who had visited White Sands from May 2 to May 11.

MOH will progressively inform these individuals via an SMS notification with information on how to book an appointment for their test.

All visitors to White Sands during that timeframe are also advised to monitor their health closely for 14 days from their date of visit, said MOH.

They are strongly encouraged to get tested if they feel unwell. Of the five remaining linked pa-

tients, two are from the Learning Point cluster - a seven-year-old girl at Maha Bodhi School and a 72-year-old retired man.

The last three are a 34-year-old unemployed man linked to the newly formed Marina Bay Sands casino dealer cluster and a 36-year-old maid who has been linked to a personal chauffeur who previously tested positive, and a 57-year-old engineer who is a family member and household contact of the IT engineer at SP.

There were also seven imported cases who had been placed on stay-home notice on arrival in Singapore, said MOH. Of these, two are returning Singaporeans or permanent residents.

The new cases take Singapore's total to 61,613.

The number of new cases in the community has increased from 32 cases two weeks ago to 149 in the past week.

The number of unlinked cases in the community in a week has increased from seven cases to 42 over the same period.

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Update on cases

New cases: 28
Imported: 7
In community: 21
(10 linked, 11 unlinked)
In dormitories: 0

New community cases in the past week: 149
(42 unlinked cases)

Active cases: 459
In hospitals: 213 (3 in ICU)
In community facilities: 246

Deaths: 31

Patients with Covid-19 who died from other causes: 15

Total discharged: 61,108
Discharged yesterday: 19

TOTAL CASES: 61,613

Shops hit by plunge in number of customers

FROM A1

even better work-from-home arrangement," said Mr Koh Chia Ling, 50, the law firm's managing director.

Similarly, the popular heartland malls that The Straits Times visited - Nex, AMK Hub, Compass One, Waterway Point and White Sands - were significantly less crowded than usual yesterday.

The longest queues were those of patrons taking away food, especially in basements of malls where most eateries are concentrated.

Compulsory TraceTogether-only SafeEntry check-in via the mobile app or token also kicked in yesterday. Most mall-goers had no issues checking in.

Many people were seen tapping their phones on the SafeEntry Gateway scanner, while others were using their TraceTogether app to scan the QR code.

A few people tried to use their identification cards, which they could no longer use for checking in. The mall staff instead directed them to download the TraceTogether app.

Following tighter restrictions that kicked in on Sunday prohibiting dining in at food and beverage outlets, tables and chairs were spotted neatly stacked at eateries.

Some eateries had already seen their takings fall by up to half on Sunday. The busiest eateries had only about 10 patrons waiting in line during the lunchtime rush.

"It used to be quite okay during lunch, but now that everyone is working from home, we just won't see a crowd anymore," said Ms Camille Hasagawa, 31, supervisor of AMK Hub's The Pine Garden kiosk.

Other retail stores across all the malls visited by ST barely had any customers.



The basement level of Tampines Mall saw more people at around lunchtime yesterday, as patrons took away food, although the popular heartland malls that The Straits Times visited were significantly less crowded than usual. ST PHOTO: LUQMANUL HAKIM

Sales assistant Lim Wei Xiang said that sales had fallen by about 70 per cent to 80 per cent compared with a week ago at Mobile Fashion, a mobile accessories store at Compass One in Sengkang.

Mr Sim Wei Bin, a sales assistant at a shop selling video games at Tampines Mall, said: "Before the measures tightened, we saw up to 20 customers in the store every hour."

But on Sunday, with the new

measures, its hourly footfall halved.

In addition, despite mandatory home-based learning for all schools taking effect from tomorrow to May 28, there seemed to be no last-minute dash for supplies

or assessment books at bookstore chains like Popular in malls such as Compass One, Tampines Mall and Nex.

Fewer than 10 shoppers at a time were spotted inside these outlets around lunchtime when ST visited.

Housewife Intan Adzurah, who was getting lunch at Nex, said she is ready for home-based learning with her nine-year-old daughter Sayyidah Nafeeah.

"She is the only child, so I am not in a hurry (to stock up)," said Ms Intan.

Yesterday, the Ministry of Health started mandatory swabbing for staff and tenants of White Sands and the Giant supermarket outlet at Block 440 Pasir Ris Drive 4 as some visitors to these places had tested positive for Covid-19 over the past two weeks.

While the mall remained open to the public, it was mostly empty.

Cashier Azimah Muhammad, 61, who works at the Value Shop in White Sands, said she went for the swab test to have peace of mind.

Ms Loo Chia Hui, 24, who works at box concept store Cube Sprout, which sells a range of products, including electronics, said that the swab test at the mall was her second one.

Replying to ST queries on the impact of the restrictions, the Singapore Retailers Association said that the Government should extend the Jobs Support Scheme to retailers.

"With this more dangerous (Covid-19) variant that is going around, the work-from-home directive as a default and schools implementing home-based learning, there is just no more traffic," said the association's executive director Rose Tong.

"Staying open doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to make money (when) there is no body in the malls."

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• Additional reporting by Jason Quah

Close contacts of infected nurse at Raffles Hospital test negative

All the close contacts of a coronavirus-positive nurse at Raffles Hospital have tested negative so far. They were swabbed following the positive test of the 29-year-old woman, who was one of 17 unlinked Covid-19 patients reported in the community on Sunday.

"We continue to ask the staff to closely monitor their health, and are in frequent contact daily with this group of staff to ensure they are safe, well and supported during this period," the Raffles Medical Group said in response to queries from The Straits Times yesterday.

"We are also concurrently working with the Ministry of Health

(MOH) to assess the patients for potential risk mitigation."

The nurse has been discharged from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) after being assessed as likely to be a "chronic shedder".

She will now be on hospitalisation leave at home for seven days, said a Raffles Medical Group spokesman. The private healthcare provider owns Raffles Hospital.

The nurse was well, and "we are in frequent contact to ensure (she) is supported in this period", said the spokesman.

Raffles Medical Group added that the hospital had been deep

cleaned and disinfected, and operations had resumed.

The nurse arrived from the Philippines on April 1 and was under a stay-home notice order at a dedicated facility until April 14. Her swab test done on April 14 came back negative for Covid-19.

She is asymptomatic, and the infection was detected when she was tested last Friday as part of the rostered routine testing (RRT) of healthcare workers.

Her test result came back positive the next day. She had received her first dose of the vaccine on May 8.

In response to queries on how the nurse caught the virus, Raffles Medical Group said it was still working with MOH on investigations into the case.

"Our priority is first and foremost to ensure that all our patients and staff are well, and to actively mitigate any risk of Covid-19 through existing infection control protocols and RRT."

Ng Wei Kai

TTSH to resume admissions today

Adeline Tan

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) will resume admissions from today, two weeks after it stopped admitting patients due to a Covid-19 cluster.

The hospital said in a media release last night that six rounds of testing for all inpatients and two rounds for all 12,000 staff on campus have been completed, and the swabbing results have consistently returned negative.

The hospital said: "This gives us added assurance that the containment measures are tight, and our processes have been in place across the hospital. As we progressively reopen our hospital, we will continue to monitor the situation closely and stay vigilant and strengthen our defences."

Admissions will resume from 8am, with the Singapore Civil Defence Force conveying urgent ambulance cases to the hospital's emergency department from 8am to 8pm daily. The hospital will also see to urgent clinic appointments and elective procedures during this period.

It said it will take a three-pronged approach to ensure that patients and staff are protected.

All patients who are admitted will be swabbed on admission, on a regular schedule during their stay, and prior to their discharge. All inpatients will also be on surgical masks if they are able to wear one based on their medical condition.

Inpatients who develop acute respiratory infection (ARI) symptoms will also be tested.

Visitor restriction will continue to be in place, said TTSH.

For the next two weeks, the hos-

pital will allow for one pre-registered visitor per patient, with a limit of one visit per day for up to 30 minutes. Visitors are to be masked at all times, and will have to refrain from eating and drinking during their visit to the wards.

Patients who have been in hospital during the last two weeks and are medically fit with consistent negative test results will be discharged and placed on either stay-home notice or quarantine order.

All staff will also undergo routine rostered testing (RRT) at regular intervals, with an ARI clinic set up for staff on campus.

Disinfection at the hospital has also been ramped up, with other measures to enhance the ventilation of the general wards, such as the addition of exhaust fans, being considered.

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