

(From left) National Centre for Infectious Diseases consultant Sapna P. Sadarangani with Tan Tock Seng Hospital's nurse clinician Ye Xiuhua, deputy director of nursing for specialist outpatient clinics Karen Gomathy Rajoo, and senior consultant Angela Chow. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSIUS CHERN



Move to let patients get pneumococcal, flu jabs at TTSH clinics

Nurse-led initiative for seniors and those at risk of the illnesses being piloted at 7 clinics

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

From 2023, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) will progressively roll out a nurse-led initiative to get elderly patients and those at risk of developing influenza or pneumococcal infections to be vaccinated against the two diseases at the specialist outpatient clinic where they are seeking help.

The hospital is currently piloting it at seven clinics, and aims to offer this service at all of its 32 clinics in a few years' time, said Ms Karen Gomathy Rajoo, TTSH's deputy director of nursing for specialist outpatient clinics, at a media session on Thursday.

Outside this initiative, patients may get the flu or pneumococcal vaccines if their doctors recommend that they do so, and they have to make their way to another clinic to get the jabs.

Other hospitals may offer a service like TTSH's in time to come.

TTSH nurse clinician Ye Xiuhua said some staff of the upcoming Woodlands Health Campus who are currently stationed at TTSH are undergoing training.

In Singapore, the 2019 National Population Health Survey showed that one in five people aged 60 to 74 reported receiving the flu jab in the previous 12 months, and only one in 10 Singapore residents aged 65 to 74 had ever taken the pneumococcal vaccine.

The rates are low, Associate Professor Angela Chow, the head and senior consultant at TTSH's Department of Preventive and Population Medicine, told the media.

Many people do not bother about flu jabs, said Prof Chow. Some seniors, for example, think that influenza probably does not happen in Singapore.

"So, they take it only when they travel. They also think that they are not susceptible to it," she added.

Others mistake the common cold for influenza.

"It's not really the common cold viruses that we are concerned about because all of us get the common cold... We might feel a bit unwell, a bit fatigued, but you will get over it," said Dr Sapna P. Sadarangani, a consultant at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases.

But it is "well recognised" that influenza "can kill people... by causing pneumonia, triggering heart at-

tacks, and even affect the brain and so on".

And it is the very young, older adults with pre-existing conditions and those with weakened immune systems who are affected, she added.

Dr Sapna said a recently published study in the *npj Vaccines* journal that she, Prof Chow and other ex-

perts worked on showed that adults aged 65 and above with metabolic comorbidities, such as diabetes and hypertension, have good immune response to the influenza vaccine if their conditions are well controlled.

Their antibody response to the vaccine was measured one month after vaccination.

Furthermore, their level of antibodies against the most common circulating influenza sub-type goes up if they engage in physical activities.

"A lot of people were saying that they have diabetes, so they won't respond to the vaccine, so why take it? But that's not true," said Dr Sapna, the principal investigator and first author of this study.

"If you're active, if you treat your diabetes and so on... your immune system will respond to vaccines." Dr Sapna said that only a subset of those who have the "flu" have influenza virus infection, as what many people perceive as flu may be an acute respiratory illness that is caused by other viruses.

Some people have complained about getting the flu after taking the flu vaccine, said Dr Sapna. "But it may be a cold virus," she said.

"The (flu jab) is not a live vaccine, so it cannot give you flu symptoms. It protects against influenza infection, which has the potential to cause death, and ICU admissions, and not the normal cold," she said.

There is no vaccine for the common cold. Flu jabs are taken annually, while pneumococcal vaccines are taken once.

There are two types of pneumococcal vaccines. One dose of each type can provide those aged 65 and above with lifetime protection.

Dr Sapna and Prof Chow, the senior author of the study, said that the uptrend in flu cases here is expected to continue in the next few weeks, which makes it more important for the elderly and those at risk of severe infection to get the jab.

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\$182k lost to parcel delivery phishing scams in last 2 weeks

Yong Li Xuan

At least 130 people have lost about \$182,000 after falling for phishing scams involving the delivery of parcels in the last two weeks.

The police issued an advisory on Thursday warning the public of the re-emergence of such phishing scams during the festive season.

Victims would receive e-mails or text messages informing them that their parcels are awaiting delivery or that they have outstanding bills.

They would click on a URL link in the message to find out more about their parcel deliveries.

After clicking the link, they would be redirected to fraudulent websites that request their credit or debit card details and one-time passwords (OTPs).

They would realise they had been scammed only after discovering unauthorised transactions made to their credit or debit cards.

The police advised the public not to click on URL links in unsolicited e-mails or text messages.

People should always verify the authenticity of the information with official websites or sources, even if they are expecting parcels to be delivered, and check details of transactions before approving any, the police said.

Also, the public should never disclose personal or Internet banking details and OTPs to anyone.

Lastly, people should report any



fraudulent credit or debit charges to their bank and cancel the card immediately, the police added.

The Straits Times reported on Aug 29 that \$346.5 million was lost to all scams in the first half of this year. This is more than half of the \$633.3 million lost in the whole of 2021.

Those with information on such crimes can call the police hotline on 1800-255-0000 or submit it online at <https://str.sg/wCCM>.

All information will be kept strictly confidential.

For more information on scams, the public can visit <https://str.sg/wCCQ> or call the Anti-Scam Hotline on 1800-722-6688.

They can also sign up as an advocate at <https://str.sg/wCCA> to receive messages about the latest scams and signs to look out for, and share them with family and friends.

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Singapore to host global sustainable tourism meet for first time in 2024

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The push to make Singapore a green destination will get another boost when it hosts the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) global conference for the first time in November 2024.

It will be another notch in the nation's belt in hosting major sustainability-related events, as part of the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) strategy to promote the Republic's green credentials.

The conference will take place from Nov 13 to 15 in 2024. The GSTC sets and manages the global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, which are used by businesses, government agencies and other organisations, and as a basis for certification.

The 2022 edition of the GSTC global conference, which was held in Seville, Spain, ended on Thursday.

Dr Edward Koh, executive director for conventions, meetings and incentive travel at STB, said: "GSTC's decision to hold their 2024 global conference in Singapore reflects our growing appeal as a global-Asia node for quality events with sustainability as a focus.

"Sustainability is a national priority for Singapore and our tourism sector. We are excited to see influential tourism stakeholders globally and in Singapore forge new part-

nerships and address critical issues in sustainable tourism at the event," said Dr Koh, who is also co-chair of the Mice Sustainability Committee.

Mice refers to meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. It is not yet known how many participants are expected to attend the 2024 conference.

Earlier in December, the Mice Sustainability Committee, formed by STB and the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers, unveiled a sustainability road map to green the events sector by covering areas such as waste and emissions tracking.

Mice events have gradually returned to Singapore since October, when vaccination-differentiated safe management measures for events with more than 500 participants were lifted. These rules were among the last of Singapore's Covid-19 restrictions to go, after the bulk of them, including the need to mask up in most settings, was dropped in late August.

Singapore has hosted at least six significant sustainability-related events in 2022, including the CleanEnviro Summit Singapore and World Cities Summit.

Besides the GSTC global conference, at least five other events, including the Asia Climate Forum, have been confirmed for 2023 and beyond.

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