



FOR IMMEDIATE REPORTING

**COLLECTIVE ACTIONS TO SLOW DOWN
COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION**

Over the last week, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has uncovered several large clusters such as at bus interchanges, BHG Bugis Junction and Changi General Hospital. Many of the cases and clusters arose because of higher levels of interactions between people, either in social settings or workplaces.

2. While Singapore continues to transit to living with the virus as a COVID-19 resilient nation, we need to continue to ensure that our hospital capacity can cope with the rising cases, bearing in mind we still admit many patients for observation in hospitals as a precaution, even though they have no or mild symptoms. Hence, last Friday (3 September 2021), the Multi-Ministry Taskforce announced that we will be taking several actions to slow down community transmission, including through more pervasive testing. In particular, we will implement additional measures targeted at detecting cases quickly and reducing infections in workplaces, so as to reduce the risk of large spikes in cases.

Updates on Local COVID-19 Situation

3. Our high vaccination coverage has allowed us to keep the incidences of severe illnesses and deaths low amongst vaccinated individuals. However, unvaccinated individuals remain susceptible – over the last 28 days, 6.7% of unvaccinated cases fell severely ill or died. Meanwhile, the number of new infection cases in the community has almost doubled to more than 1,200 cases in the week ending 5 September 2021, up from around 600 cases in the week before. If the infection continues at this trajectory, we will see a doubling of cases every week. This means that we can expect to see more individuals suffer serious consequences due to COVID-19 infection.

4. Thus, we need to take quick action now to dampen the increasing likelihood of an exponential increase in cases. This will also buy us time to get more people, in particular seniors, vaccinated as soon as possible, and also to roll out our booster programme to those aged 60 and above.

Updates to Public Health Actions

5. We will continue strengthening public health actions to reduce the spread of infection. Once a cluster of cases is identified, in addition to the quarantine of close contacts, we will send out Health Risk Warnings (HRW) and Health Risk Alerts (HRA) to individuals to cast a wide net around the cases, and to contain the clusters quickly. With more cases circulating in the community, there will also be more people being issued such HRWs or HRAs.

6. HRW and HRA are not quarantine orders. However, individuals who receive a HRW will be required by law to get a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test and self-isolate until they receive a negative result from their first test. They will also be required to do ART tests thereafter, and a PCR test on the 14th day. Individuals who receive a HRA are not subject to actions required by the law but are strongly encouraged to go for a PCR test as soon as possible. **For both HRW and HRA, individuals should reduce their social interactions for 14 days.**

Updates to Testing Regimes

7. Testing continues to be an important part of our strategy to detect and ringfence infections in the community early. Given the rate of increase in community spread, we will be increasing the frequency of our mandatory Fast and Easy Test (FET) Rostered Routine Testing (RRT) regime from once every fortnight to once a week. This enhanced frequency, which will take effect from 13 September 2021, will allow us to detect and ringfence cases more quickly. This is particularly important given the infectiousness of the Delta variant, as observed locally where there have been shorter periods between each generation of infection.

8. The mandatory FET RRT is now in place for higher-risk settings such as F&B, personal care services, and gym and fitness studios. We will extend this requirement to more settings with frequent community interactions. This includes settings such as retail mall workers, supermarket staff, last-mile delivery personnel (including parcel and food delivery personnel), and public and private transport workers (taxi drivers, private hire car drivers and all public transport frontline staff). All workers who have to go to work in such settings must also undergo a seven-day FET RRT regime. These tests will continue to be administered primarily through Employer Supervised Self-Swab. The Government will subsidise the costs of all tests under this enhanced surveillance regime, for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, until the end of 2021. The relevant Government Agencies will release more details on the enhanced surveillance regime at a later date.

9. Besides the sectors that are subject to mandatory RRT, we want to step up regular testing, especially for those who are now working onsite. Hence the MTF will undertake a time-limited distribution of ART kits to companies. We will offer each company 8 kits per employee, for weekly testing of their staff over a two-month period. With these kits, we expect all companies to initiate weekly testing for their onsite staff. These tests can be administered by the individuals themselves at home, or at the work premises. But employers should put in place a process to ensure that the tests are done properly, and report the results to respective Government Agencies. More details will be made available at a later date.

10. We hope that the distribution of ART kits to both households and companies will help to instil a culture of responsibility in administering regular self-tests. This will become an important tool in the new normal, so that we can dampen the impact of COVID-19 without having to impose heightened alerts.

11. However, testing alone is not enough. We must also all continue to practise socially responsible behaviour: visit a doctor if feeling unwell, and self-isolate and not

report to work. Employers are also strongly encouraged to remind your employees to visit a doctor if feeling unwell and not report to work, and to work out business continuity plans to cater to the scenario of positive cases in your workplace if it occurs despite your best efforts to ask them to stay at home if unwell.

Updates to Safe Management Measures

Workplace Measures

12. We have observed that the recent clusters in workplace settings have taken place because of lax Safe Management Measures, especially in areas like staff canteens and pantries where people tend to let their guard down and interact amongst themselves without their masks on. Hence, we will no longer allow social gatherings and interactions at workplaces from 8 September 2021.

13. In addition, we will take tougher action if there are positive cases amongst workers who are infected. In particular, employers will be required to put in place a maximum Work-From-Home (WFH) requirement over a 14 day period, should one or more of their workers be found to have contracted COVID-19 and have returned to their workplace. This means that everyone in the company who can WFH will be required to do so. Those who are working from home should minimise social gatherings and leave their homes only for essential activities during this 14-day period. More details will be released by MOM.

Social Gatherings

14. We strongly encourage all individuals, especially the vulnerable elderly or persons staying with elderly, to reduce their non-essential social activities for the next two weeks. We should continue to limit our social circle to a small group of regular contacts and limit ourselves to one social gathering a day, whether to another household or in a public place. All individuals, including both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, should also self-test regularly with ARTs, especially if we participate in higher-risk activities or attend large-scale events. These ART kits are now sold at most supermarkets and convenience stores.

Towards a COVID-Resilient Singapore

15. We will monitor the local situation closely for the next two weeks. We seek everyone's cooperation in ramping up self-testing and in observing all safe management measures so that we can lower transmission risks together. Everyone can play their role by minimising their movement and social interactions so that we can reduce footfall at common spaces at or near the workplace and in public venues, especially when there are sharp increases in transmissions. If you are unwell, please see a doctor and get tested, and self-isolate and not report to work or participate in social activities until you have recovered. We will continue to work together with Singaporeans to emerge stronger and safer in our journey towards a COVID-19 resilient nation.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH
6 SEPTEMBER 2021
