They have been moved to alternative sites to minimise risk of getting infected and disruption to services: Task force

Lim Mei Zhen

Brigadier General Senthil Subramani Pillai, commandant of the Singapore Armed Forces, is in charge of the inter-agency task force handling the movement of the workforce from dormitories to alternative living arrangements. The task force consists of about 700 people.

Most of the foreign workers in essential services living in purpose-built dormitories—about 7,500 of them—have moved to alternative living areas such as military camps, floating hotels, sports halls and purpose-built housing blocks. This move is to minimise disruption to essential services, disrupt the transmission of the virus and minimise the risk of these healthy workers getting infected, said an inter-agency task force handling the coronavirus outbreak in foreign worker dormitories.

The Singapore Armed Forces and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) will work together to ensure these workers are moved if required, said Mr. Senthil Subramani Pillai.

Permanent Secretary for Manpower Ashley Kam noted that the task force has wholly stabilised the living conditions in purpose-built dormitories.

He lauded the efforts of operations, which is "very critical"; involves putting in place medical support so that workers can receive good treatment.

"Thermal fever camps set up by task teams at all 43 purpose-built dormitories by next week," he said.

This is in line with the medical centre’s plan to deploy regular screening of temperatures at the eight dormitories that have been identified as institutions.

"The next step is to reinforce our healthcare capacity, and we will expand our healthcare capacity," he added.

He said: "Our focus is on healthcare protection, and we will expand our healthcare capacity. The end goal is to restore normalcy, ensure that dormitories can be used and our workers can return to work.

"We have identified that the task force will also have to establish an isolation ward for suspected cases, and we will establish a ward for confirmed cases. The hospitalisation rate is expected to increase over the coming days, we will ensure that we have the right capacities and facilities in place.

"We have identified that there are gaps in our infrastructure, especially in the areas of manpower and essential services. The task force is working hard to address these gaps. We will ensure that we have the right capacities and facilities in place.

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Types of accommodation

**Purpose-built dormitories**

There are about 4,000 of such dormitories, which house about 180,000 foreign workers.

These bigger dorms can house 500 to 2,000 workers each. The workers are expected to remain for about three to four months. The Ministry of Manpower has recommended the use of purpose-built dormitories.

**Factory-converted dormitories**

There are about 12,000 of such dormitories, housing about 95,000 workers.

These tend to be smaller, with a capacity of 50 to 100 workers. Some can house up to 500 workers.

These dormitories are typically closer to workplaces.

**Temporary accommodation**

These are also smaller numbers of temporary quarters and temporary living quarters.

These generally do not house more than 40 workers each, and are regularly supervised.

On-site housing

There is also a smaller number of construction temporary quarters and temporary living quarters.

These typically do not house more than 40 workers each, and are regularly supervised.

The next phase of operations, which is "very critical", involves putting in place medical support so that workers can receive good treatment, said Permanent Secretary for Manpower Ashley Kam. The task force plans to set up medical teams at all 43 purpose-built dormitories by next week.

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