3-year-old girl with virus still in hospital after 29 days

50 children and adolescents infected by coronavirus here; half of them still in hospital

Cheryl Tan

A total of 50 children and adolescents have been infected with the Covid-19 virus here, with around half of them still in hospital.

Among them is a three-year-old Singaporean girl (Case 562), who has been warded for 29 days – the longest stay of all children so far – since she tested positive for the Covid-19 virus on March 24.

She was sent to K. Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KSH) after testing positive, and is linked to Cases 418 and 647, whom The Straits Times understands to be the girl’s parents. Both were imported cases who had returned from the United States, and they were discharged on April 9 and April 6 respectively.

Of the 50 children and adolescents who have been infected, eight of them are aged one and below. Thirteen are aged above one to six, while 22 are aged between seven and 12. Seven are aged 13 to 16.

Five children tested positive for the virus on April 13. Four of them were related and linked to a family member found to have contracted the virus on April 12. The fifth was a one-year-old girl whose family member was infected.

The 50 cases to date, a one-year-old boy was the fastest to recover. He tested positive for the virus on Feb 16 and was discharged five days later. The boy was one of the 174 passengers on the second Scent Flight chartered to evacuate Singaporeans and their family members from Wuhan on Feb 9.

Professor Dale Fisher, group director of medicine at the National University Health System and chairman of the World Health Organisation’s Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, had said children appear to be asymptomatic or less likely to be sick from Covid-19 than adults.

With other diseases such as chicken pox and hepatitis A, children also experience milder or no symptoms compared with adults, which suggests that they may have a different kind of immune system.

He also added that in Singapore’s family clusters, there is no evidence that the child was the first person to contract the virus. Instead, it is usually the other way round – parents infecting the child, though they can remain asymptomatic even when they test positive for the Covid-19 virus.

Dr Sharon Nachus, head of paediatric infectious diseases at St Mary’s Hospital in New York state, told The Straits Times: “Children are among the last people to get infected, so our immune systems are tuned up and respond nicely to novel infections.”

In a study published last month in the journal Pediatrics, researchers from the paediatric division of the medical school at Shang- hai Jiao Tong University studied 2,243 infected children in China. They found that 10.9 per cent of children experienced only symptoms, 38.8 per cent had moderate symptoms and 6.4 per cent had no symptoms.

The remaining 49.8 per cent were serious cases, which was well below the 26.9 per cent of adults who experienced severe symptoms.

However, the study said younger children are more likely to suffer severe symptoms than older ones after contracting the coronavirus.

The data showed that infected children younger than one year old suffered severe to critical symptoms10.6 per cent of the time. Children from ages one to five, on the other hand, experienced critical symptoms 7.3 per cent of the time. Those who were in and older experienced these symptoms 3.3 per cent of the time.

In a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report released by the US Centres for Disease Control on April 6, it was found that compared with adults, children who are under the age of 18 are less likely to experience fever, cough or shortness of breath.

Other studies have also shown that children tend to have longer incubation and virus shedding periods compared with adults.