Virus cases cross 10,000; experts see tough battle ahead

Heightened circuit breaker measures come into effect as new dorm cases remain high

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Coronavirus infections in Singapore crossed the 10,000 mark yesterday, as experts told The Straits Times that the numbers could potentially rise dramatically over the next few days, with the country locked in battle with a “smart” virus that is able to exploit any weak links in the system.

Another 1,016 new Covid-19 cases were confirmed yesterday, taking the total to 10,141.

New cases in foreign worker dormitories continued to make up the bulk of the increase, accounting for 967 of yesterday’s new cases, while 32 cases involved workers not living in dorms.

There were also 17 Singaporeans and permanent residents among the new cases.

Another 57 patients were discharged, even as an 84-year-old Singaporean woman became the 12th patient to die of Covid-19.

Yesterday also marked the start of heightened circuit breaker measures that will last at least until May 4 to further curtail the virus’ spread in the general community.

Entry to four popular wet markets was restricted based on the last digit of a shopper’s NRIC number or foreign identification number, leading to thinner crowds.

Environment and Water Resources Minister Masagos Zulkifli said on Facebook: “If we stay at home as much as possible, we can help bring local transmission numbers down. Then, the multi-ministry task force can ease some of the measures earlier rather than later.”

The minister also noted that enforcement officers caught about 150 people who were not complying with safe distancing measures yesterday, and another 50 who did not wear masks while they were out.

Meanwhile, experts at a panel hosted by The Straits Times warned of a tough slog ahead. They said cases at dorms would remain high for days to come, reflecting the “tremendous effort” directed at reinforcing this weaklink.

An infected person living in a dense environment like a dorm could spread the virus to five to 10 others and there could be 4,000 to 5,000 new cases daily in four to five days and as many as 10,000 daily in 10 days, if no measures were taken to contain the virus, said Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore.

Meanwhile, Professor Dale Fisher of the National University Hospital said that keeping thousands of workers in the 43 large purpose-built dorms in their rooms until transmissions decrease was a major undertaking, as it involved providing them food, Wi-Fi and on-site medical services.

He also said this was no ordinary virus that Singapore was battling. It was really smart and could home in on areas where there was high transmission.

This was echoed by Professor Leo Yee Sin, executive director of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, who said: “This is a very smart virus, it will find ways to remain in the human population. So it is not a simple virus for us to deal with. There is human-to-human transmission. It can transmit when we are not aware.”

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Stay home, so curbs can be eased

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Environment and Water Resources Minister Masagos Zulkifli