Dining in at eateries proven to be highly infectious activity

It comes as no surprise that dining in at eateries will remain prohibited when the circuit breaker ends next month, given that the coronavirus has proven highly infectious in such settings, Professor Teo Yik Ying said yesterday.

Prof Teo, dean of the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, told The Straits Times: “We have seen that the virus is transmitted very well when people dine together, and there have been instances in Singapore where the spread was because people came together for meals.”

From June 2, schools will reopen and some people will be allowed to return to their workplaces.

Priority will go to critical sectors and businesses that operate in settings with lower transmission risks.

But those now working from home must continue to do so. Shops will stay closed, and there will be no dining in at restaurants and other food outlets.

Prof Teo acknowledged that cities such as Hong Kong have allowed people to dine at restaurants and even watch movies, subject to limitations, but added that Singapore is different.

He noted that new cases are expected to rise as strict circuit breaker measures are eased, and allowing people to resume their usual activities would make it difficult to tell what has contributed to the increase.

“We don’t want the signal to be confused – whether it is workplaces that have increased the spread of the virus, or whether it is dining in, or so on,” Prof Teo said.

The Government, like in many other countries, will have to learn what works and what does not in what he termed an “experimental phase”.

“We cannot say, ‘This works in Hong Kong. Let’s do it here.’ The reality is that every country has very different contexts in this situation.”

Linnette Lai