With colourful panels and cheeky titles like “Don’t Touch My Mask” and “No Breathing Allowed”, The Covid-19 Chronicles has been sharing timely reminders and useful information with the public for the past few months.

The project was conceptualised on Feb 11, when Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, attended an event with Health Minister Gan Kim Yong.

When Prof Chong mentioned that Professor Dale Fisher (above), who lectures on infectious diseases at NUS, was developing the World Health Organisation’s alert and response system, Mr Gan suggested appointing Prof Fisher as a spokesman to help ensure that information is communicated accurately and efficiently.

Prof Chong approached Prof Fisher immediately, while also discussing the need for a medium that would “grab the public’s attention easily.” He noticed that although there were many news reports and print advisories, few people had come up with comic strips about Covid-19.

As such, the communications team at Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine began looking for an artist to partner them, and reached out to illustrator Andrew Tan, who typically illustrates local children’s book series Sherlock Bum, as well as print ads, magazines and picture books.

He is also the author of two graphic novels: Monsters, Miracles and Mayhem, published by Epi- gram Books, and The Office Comic Diary of a first time dad, which is self-published.

Prof Chong, 55, says: “I thought a well-drawn cartoon would stand out, and to our surprise, it really captured the imagination of the public. We also thought some levity would be appreciated during these uncertain times.”

The comic strips, which have been released about three times a week since Feb 14, are indeed popular for their bite-sized content and often humorous dialogues.

In “Washing Out During Phase 2”, for instance, four friends meet for a meal of prawns. They remind one another of the necessary precautions to take — like self-distancing, hand-washing and limiting group sizes.

But in the last panel, they are seen grilling, drenching their bellies and saying: “I think we forgot about one other precaution — Singapurdiddle.”

Another comic, “Spot the Misset in Each Scene”, encourages readers to look out for mistakes like different teams interacting with one another at the office.

It is a creative reminder to “stay vigilant in observing safe management measures” as employees return to the office.

To date, the NUS team and Mr Tan have uploaded 70 comic strips on their website, some of which were drawn by another illustrator Anggee Neo, their back-up artist.

Collectively, the comic strips have been viewed more than three million times on various social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

“We are very heartened that our single health messages are helping to fight against Covid-19 by getting accurate information out, debunking myths, and providing some joy and laughter,” says Prof Chong.

Hannah Bock