Join experts at ST webinar as they discuss Covid-19, six months on

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The first case of Covid-19 was reported in China over seven months ago, with Singapore recording its first infection on Jan 23. Six months on, the pandemic is still far from over, experts are warning, and infections have gathered pace.

Globally, there are now more than 13 million confirmed cases and over half a million deaths.

While some countries like China and New Zealand have begun to return to a sense of normalcy, others like the United States and Brazil continue to report high numbers of new cases daily. A number of countries have also seen a resurgence in cases after a period of reporting few or no cases.

Singapore will hit the six-month mark on Thursday. On that day, The Straits Times will host an online webinar with a panel of experts who will discuss what we can expect in the days ahead.

The panel will consist of Professor Teo Yik Ying, who is dean of the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health; Professor Dale Fisher, a senior infectious diseases consultant at the National University Hospital and chair of the World Health Organisation’s Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network steering committee; and Professor Ooi Eng Eong, deputy director of the emerging infectious diseases programme at Duke-NUS Medical School who is working on Covid-19 treatments and vaccines.

ST’s senior health correspondent Salma Khalik will moderate the discussion.

Some of the topics to be discussed include what scientists have learnt about the virus and what the resurgence in cases overseas means for Singapore.

Yesterday, the Health Ministry said Singapore can learn useful lessons from the experiences of countries that have seen a spike in cases after they resumed normal activities, such as what the key drivers of infection are.

Singapore can also learn about the efficacy of safe management measures and potential gaps that could have led to outbreaks, the ministry said.

It cited cases in Israel and Australia’s Victoria state that were linked to non-compliance with social distancing measures, such as going out while one is unwell or organising large parties.

“Clusters had also been observed in Hong Kong due to reported falling compliance to mask-wearing in restaurants and cafes,” the ministry said in a statement.

“There are also useful reminders of the inherent risk in settings where there is close, prolonged contact among individuals.

“For example, South Korea reported clusters in religious gatherings at churches, temples and in workplaces, while both South Korea and Tokyo, Japan, reported clusters traced to night-life establishments,”

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong told a virtual press conference yesterday that transmission in the general community here remains low despite an increase in the number of such cases since Singapore lifted circuit breaker measures a month and a half ago.

“But this is not the time to celebrate and be complacent. We are certainly not out of the woods yet,” he said, adding that the World Health Organisation has warned that the situation could get worse unless there is a collective global effort to control the transmission of the virus.

“We must be prepared for a second wave too, but we must do our best to avoid it if we can,” he said.

Mr Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief of Singapore Press Holdings’ English/Malay/Tamil Media Group and editor of The Straits Times, said: “This pandemic does look like it will be with us for some time, and we want to look back at what we have learnt about the virus over the past six months, and more importantly, where the experts think we might be heading in this crisis.

“This discussion aims to help our readers make sense of developments and help them navigate the way forward for their families, businesses and organisations.”

The ST webinar will take place on the video conferencing platform Zoom, and ST readers can sign up to attend at str.sg/covid19webinar. Registration closes at noon on Tuesday.

Successful registrants will get the access code to attend and will be able to ask the panel questions live. Those who are unable to attend can send their questions in advance to askst@sph.com.sg with “ST Covid-19 Webinar” in the subject line.

A recording of the discussion will also be made available online after the webinar ends.

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