Experts: Containing virus the best strategy

Much can – and, in fact, must – be done today to stop the spread of Covid-19, before the advent of a viable vaccine, said several experts from around the world.

Speaking at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine’s final Covid-19 webinar last night, they raised concerns that even when an effective vaccine emerges, there will not be enough for everyone, given the limited production capacity in the world today.

Instead, countries that have more successfully reduced transmission have shown that if everyone does his part, the disease can be contained – and this will remain the most effective strategy for some time to come.

The experts, led by World Health Organisation head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also spoke of the need for global cooperation to overcome the pandemic that has impacted not just health, but also the economy and people’s livelihood.

They lauded the way scientists and doctors around the world have been sharing their research and discoveries, and done so at “unprecedented speed”.

Said Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore: “To survive in the short term, we need national solidarity. But to survive in the long term, we need global solidarity.”
What the experts say

**FAILURE TO PREPARE**

It has never been clearer that health is a political and economic choice. In the past 20 years, countries have invested heavily in preparing for terrorist attacks but relatively little in preparing for the attack of a virus which, as the pandemic has proven, can be far more deadly, disruptive and costly.

**ALARM BELLS IGNORED**

The Covid catastrophe is tragic for so many reasons, but in part because it was predictable. Alarms have been ignored for decades and promises to prepare have been broken. We have seen the cycles of crisis, concern, and then complacency.

**PUT SOCIETY BEFORE SELF**

I am convinced that if we can put our hearts and minds to it, we can prevail, but it needs us all to acknowledge the importance of putting society before self, to maintain the discipline, to not be complacent.

**LESSONS FROM ASIA**

People in Asia have had much solidarity among themselves, not only in understanding and doing prevention for themselves but also in preventing infection from others. Lessons that we have learnt in Asia will be very important, moving forward.

**NEED FOR HUMILITY**

A few countries including Singapore were initially held up as models for other countries to follow in dealing with Covid-19. Without fail, all of them succumbed to huge outbreaks subsequently. There is a need for humility in the face of an unknown and unpredictable novel pathogen.

**IMPACT ON THE VULNERABLE**

Our societies are much more brittle than we thought. And this fact has important implications for how we manage the pandemic in the future, because the vulnerable groups in our societies have been starkly revealed... We are seeing that Covid-19, as is the case for all pandemics, strikes the poorest and the most vulnerable the hardest.