Covid-19 tests for 980 food delivery and hawker stall workers

To be held at two places, the voluntary testing is due to their high interaction with the public

Timothy Goh

About 980 workers and tenants of hawker centres and coffee shops, as well as food delivery workers, are expected to be swabbed for Covid-19 this weekend.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, the National Environment Agency, Singapore Food Agency and Enterprise Singapore said yesterday that the tests will take place at the pavilion beside Block 75 Marine Drive and at the open plaza in front of Block 50A Marine Terrace.

The tests are part of a larger initiative that the Ministry of Health (MOH) announced on Aug 29 which involves offering one-time polymerase chain reaction tests to community groups such as taxi and private-hire car drivers, food delivery workers and key vendors servicing foreign worker dormitories.

MOH said that the community groups were identified due to their high frequency of interaction with members of the public. It added that the tests are being carried out to provide a better picture of the prevalence of the virus in the population.

MOH said that tests under this initiative are voluntary as there has been no local evidence that the identified community groups are at higher risk of getting infected.

This weekend's tests are being offered to stallholders, stall assistants and cleaners working at seven selected coffee shops in the Marine Parade and Joo Chiat area, as well as those in the Block 84 Marine Parade Central, Block 50A Marine Terrace and Dunman Food Centre hawker centres and markets.

Grassroots leaders and the local merchants’ and hawkers’ associations have been engaging them since Monday to inform them about the tests.

Some food delivery workers with Deliveroo, Foodpanda, GrabFood and McDonald’s have also pre-registered for the test.

The tests this weekend are not open to anyone aside from these two groups. The results should be ready two to three days after the tests, and only those who test positive will be contacted by the authorities.

Testing is a key part of the fight against the coronavirus here.

Earlier this week, MOH said that on average, over 20,000 swabs have been tested daily since July. These include pooled tests where up to five swabs per test can be done.

“We continue to make progress in expanding our testing capacity and are on track to performing 40,000 tests a day, if needed, in the coming months,” said the ministry.

MOH also told ST on Thursday that the use of saliva testing to detect Covid-19 is undergoing field tests here as the health authorities assess if it can be scaled up for widespread use.

The ministry said that its preliminary findings showed saliva testing may be “slightly more comfortable for some individuals”, though mechanisms to scale up testing in laboratories, including pooled testing, are still being developed.

As of noon yesterday, 11 new coronavirus cases were confirmed, taking Singapore’s total to 57,543.

This is the lowest daily figure in about six months since March 12, when there were nine cases.

But Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said that despite the low number of cases, Singapore is “still not out of the woods”, and that this will happen only when the global situation stabilizes.

He added: “Now that we have settled the dorms, and community cases remain low, there is a possibility that we will reach zero cases.

“But now the next threat we have is the risk of importing cases, especially with loosening of border restrictions in the months ahead and more people travelling. We need to prevent imported cases from seeping into the community and make sure they are being detected and ring-fenced at the borders.”

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