Stepped-up checks on F&B outlets over festive period

Ministry reminds all that Covid-19 remains grave threat; offenders will face tough action

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As the year-end festive season approaches, Singapore has put its guard up to ensure that there is no let-up on safety measures to keep the coronavirus at bay.

Starting this weekend, there will be more checks on food and beverage (F&B) outlets to make sure that safe management measures are being complied with, said the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) yesterday.

The stepped-up surveillance will extend over the next few weeks to cover the end-of-year festive period.

The enforcement clampdown comes at a time when Singapore has seen low numbers of community cases — with none in the past week. The authorities, however, are taking no chances.

“While we recognise that many may wish to meet up with family and friends during the festive period or visit popular areas such as Orchard Road, food and beverage outlets and members of the public must continue to take safe management measures seriously, as dining out is an activity that involves considerable risks,” said the ministry.

Under current rules, social gatherings in groups of more than five are not allowed outside an individual’s residence. F&B outlets, too, are not permitted to accept bookings from groups that are larger than five, even if such groups are split across multiple tables. Groups are not allowed to intermingle.

First-time offenders will face a fine of up to $10,000 and/or imprisonment of up to six months.

From Dec 28, when phase three kicks in, people will be allowed to meet in groups of up to eight.

Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang, vice-dean of global health at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore, said there could still be a low-level spread in the community, since many cases are asymptomatic. Several countries have learnt this the hard way, after facing second and subsequent waves of infections.

“Therefore it is still important to limit social interactions at this point in time, so we do not suddenly discover a large cluster of infections similar to what Hong Kong or South Korea experienced,” he added.

Venues such as Tanjong Beach Club in Sentosa said that they are ready for the increased checks.

“We are increasing the number of our safety ambassadors to ensure everything runs smoothly and that everyone is adhering to the government rules,” said the beach club’s general manager Christian Hartmann.

MSE repeated that although case numbers are low, offenders will face tough action.

“Covid-19 remains a grave threat and we must remain vigilant even during the festive period. The Government will not hesitate to take strong enforcement action against operators and individuals who treat safe management measures with flagrant disregard,” said the ministry.

“Errant operators and individuals will face fines, temporary closure, and prosecution to the full extent of the law.”

On Dec 5, Gemma Steakhouse at the National Gallery Singapore was ordered to suspend operations for 20 days for holding a dinner for 75 guests in October and failing to prevent mixing.

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