

Remarks by Minister Lawrence Wong, Co-chair of the Multi-Ministry Taskforce on COVID-19, at Press Conference on COVID-19 at National Press Centre on 5 April 2020

Good evening. I will give an update on our overall strategy, given the latest developments and how we are proceeding with this fight against COVID-19. We have always said that it is important to go beyond the headline numbers, and to drill down to understand what is happening, and where are the sources of outbreak.

Previously, we highlighted two categories – imported cases and local transmission cases. For the imported cases, as you can see from the latest figures, the numbers have been coming down steadily in line with the decline in the number of returnees. We have also been expanding the numbers of dedicated facilities to accommodate the returnees; and, recently we have expanded the number of countries, so that more returnees will be housed in these dedicated facilities. We are able to contain, isolate and ring-fence these returnees and any imported cases from contaminating or infecting the rest of the Singaporean community.

Now within the local cases, we should also look at it as two separate categories, and in greater detail with different strategies for these two categories. The one that we are focusing on now is the workers in the dormitories, because this foreign worker dormitory has emerged as a large cluster, and so we need a dedicated strategy to deal with the cases there, and to prevent it from spreading within the dormitories and outside of the dormitories.

You would have heard from Minister Josephine [Teo] just now on what we are doing - taking extra precautions. From Tuesday onwards, the circuit breaker kicks in – all of the foreign workers, on top of those that are at the two foreign worker dormitories that will be designated as isolation areas – all of the foreign workers in the dormitories would have to stay within their dormitories and would not be able to move out. We will make sure that within the dormitory, enhanced precautions are taken to reduce their social interactions, so that there is as little chance as possible for any infected case to cause more infection within any dormitory. We want to reduce interactions to a large extent, reduce intermingling and then limit the number of cases that can emerge within the foreign worker dormitories. And we are also not allowing them to come out of the dormitories, so that there will be no infection to the rest of the community.

With the foreign worker dormitories, looking after the workers there, taking care of their welfare, looking after all their well-being but also taking all of these precautions, I think we would be able to ring-fence and contain the infected cases in the foreign worker dormitories.

Then the next category, the second category of local cases, would be the locally transmitted cases within our own community, by residents in Singapore. And that's where all of us now will have a part to play as we embark on our nationwide circuit breaker very soon. And we really call on all Singaporeans to take this very seriously.

The last few days since we announced the measures, I think over Friday night and Saturday, you would have seen many people adjusting, preparing for the circuit breaker to kick in. We have been receiving many questions. People are asking, "Do I count as an essential service? Can I still do this or do that particular activity? Will it be allowed under the circuit breaker?" Let's make it very clear - we will settle all of these questions that are coming up; we are responding to all the businesses that are asking questions.

But the point should be very clear: if your business is not in the list of essential service, then you either have to telecommute 100% or you stop work altogether. There are no two ways about this; it is straightforward. Likewise for individuals, the rules are very clear. You stay home, do not go out, go out only for essential activities which will include work that is

considered essential or buying food and groceries, or if you were to do an individual exercise or with your immediate family members, these are allowed. Other than that, you have to stay home.

Making these adjustments will be difficult. We understand that it is not easy. Many Singaporeans have set routines and habits; the elderly like to hang out in the hawker centres and coffeeshops with their friends; the young people like to go out with their buddies and friends in malls and in places to hang out too.

But all of these cannot be tolerated anymore. We really need everyone to make individual sacrifices, make these necessary adjustments for this 1-month period of circuit breaker to be effective. If we all do our part, if we all work together, we have a chance of controlling the spread of the virus and together, we will be able to protect ourselves, our family members and save lives. Thank you.