

TRANSCRIPT OF MINISTER LAWRENCE WONG'S OPENING REMARKS AT THE MULTI-MINISTRY TASKFORCE PRESS CONFERENCE ON 20 NOVEMBER 2021

Good afternoon, I join my fellow MTF co-chairs in thanking everyone in Singapore for your cooperation throughout this Stabilisation Phase.

Through our collective efforts, we are now able to exit the Stabilisation Phase and continue our transition to living with COVID-19. The key move we are making today is to increase the group size for social gatherings from two persons to five persons. That means that every household can receive up to five distinct visitors a day.

It means that up to five vaccinated persons can dine together in F&B outlets from 22 November or next Monday. The dining rules will apply a day later to a selected group of hawker centres and coffee shops. That is because we have explained the need to put in place the proper control systems in these settings. The first batch of hawker centres and coffee shops will be able to do so from 23 November onwards, and subsequently, other hawker centres and coffee shops will join them through the next few weeks.

So these hawker centres and coffee shops will be able to also have five persons dine in, so long as the control systems are properly in place. With this move to exit the Stabilisation Phase, we will correspondingly taper down the support measures from the Government at the same time. I know many are keen to go out and meet with their family and friends and dine together in a larger group.

I just want to remind everyone to stay disciplined, and to exercise caution and restraint. We know that with this easing, there will inevitably be more social interactions and we are bound to see more infections. If we are careful and we continue to comply with all prevailing safe management measures, we should be able to cope with the increase in infections.

Conversely, if we seek to push the limits, let our guard down, we will spark a resurgence of cases which can very quickly overwhelm our hospital system yet again. We are trying very hard to avoid such a scenario and that is why we are moving incrementally and easing in small steps. So, we make one move a week ago, we eased a little and we watched the situation – it is stable, and we make another move which we will do from next Monday onwards. Then we continue to watch the situation to ensure it is stable before we make yet another move.

Of course, as we move in this step-wise manner, we want to ensure that our hospital systems remain protected and not get overwhelmed. As a last resort if this were to happen, we cannot rule out a further tapping of the brakes, and you see this happening right now in some European countries which has gone back to partial lockdowns. We will try our very best to avoid having to throttle back any measures or to avoid reversal of our moves towards easing. But we need everyone's cooperation to ensure that we can continue to move forward in a steady manner.

You will notice that in this round, we have deliberately focused the easing measures on just one key parameter, which is to move from two persons to five persons, and we are doing this together with further tightening of our vaccination-differentiated safe management measures. There have been requests for other moves, to ease in other areas, for example, to relax capacity limits for attractions, for malls, and to ease restrictions in workplaces – a whole range of other areas where we could also relax the measures further but we have decided to hold all of these back. So just make one move next Monday – two to five persons. Everything else we are holding back for the time being. And again this is part of our incremental approach. We will monitor the situation over the next few weeks and if the overall situation remains stable, our health care system remains stable, we can consider the next series of moves, say around end of December.

I would like to seek everyone's cooperation for this incremental step-by-step approach in easing our measures and moving towards COVID-resilience. It is not a big bang approach. This approach will require all of us to be patient, to be disciplined and to exercise social responsibility. But we are confident that this approach in the longer term, will yield better results, will minimise casualties and will importantly allow us steady progress towards becoming a COVID-resilient nation. Thank you.