



P R E S S R E L E A S E

1 May 2020

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TAKE CARE OF THE WELL-BEING OF FOREIGN WORKERS LIVING IN DORMITORIES

The Inter-agency Task Force (ITF) has adopted a comprehensive approach to take care of the well-being of foreign workers living in dormitories. The ITF currently comprises more than 2,200 officers from six public agencies, including the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Singapore Armed Forces, the Home Team, the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Building and Construction Authority and the Ministry of Communications and Information. ITF has recruited an additional 710 personnel directly or through private contractors. In total, the **Government is dedicating staff support of nearly 3,000.**

2 Over the past three weeks, the ITF has deployed Forward Assurance and Support Teams (FAST) to support the dormitory operators and residents. To date, more than 170 FAST teams have been deployed. This includes 43 teams stationed at all purpose-built dormitories (PDBs), and 127 mobile FAST teams providing coverage to factory converted dormitories (FCDs), construction temporary quarters (CTQs) and private residential premises.

3 The **FAST personnel look into all aspects of the workers' well-being**, from availability of food and maintenance of hygiene to facilitating their medical care and remittance needs. Another important aspect of their work is to optimise safe distancing measures for the workers. Teams are often deployed in shifts to provide 24/7 round-the-clock support.

TAKING CARE OF THE WORKERS' HEALTH

Full range of medical support to detect and treat infections

4 The ITF rapidly set up **onsite medical facilities at all 43 PDBs** with around 200,000 workers to ensure that workers who are unwell or displaying symptoms of acute respiratory infections get appropriate and timely medical treatment. Medical staff from the three public healthcare clusters operate these medical facilities.

5 To better support the healthcare needs of workers at FCDs, the ITF provides **additional medical posts at foreign workers' Recreation Centres**. These medical posts serve a combined catchment of 760 FCDs housing around 65,000 workers. They are

managed by private healthcare groups, such as Raffles Medical Group, ParkwayHealth and AcuMed Medical Group.

- Two medical posts at Kranji and Tuas South Recreation Centres have started operations, and are being equipped with isolation facilities to hold patients while awaiting swab results. These two medical posts have seen over 750 patients since mid-April.
- Another two medical posts will be set up at Woodlands and Kaki Bukit Recreation Centres in the coming week.

6 In addition, there are 12 **mobile medical teams** made up of more than 50 medical personnel deployed in the field to support our migrant workers. The teams visit FCDs with a special focus on those with higher incidence of confirmed Covid-19 cases. They also provide care and treatment for workers housed in CTQs.

7 The ITF will soon offer free shuttle services to provide a **safe mode of transport** for workers in the FCDs to visit the medical posts, Public Health Preparedness Clinics (PHPCs) or Polyclinics. Dormitory operators will be given a list of transport providers contracted by MOM to take the workers to the nearest medical post. This is to minimise the risk of cross-infection in both directions if the workers were to share other forms of transport with the broader community. The drivers will be trained and provided with Personal Protection Equipment.

Safe recovery within dorms

8 The ITF will step up the care for workers in the most affected dormitories by setting up **on-site Community Care Facilities (CCFs)** within the dormitories. The on-site CCFs will house COVID-19 positive patients who are clinically well or display mild symptoms. These patients will be moved to the CCFs almost immediately after diagnosis instead of waiting to be transferred to an off-site medical facility. We will similarly set up **on-site Community Recovery Facilities (CRFs)** to look after patients who are no longer infectious and are transferred out of the CCFs.

Post-recovery care

9 After the workers recover, our aim is to help them stay healthy and enable them to work when their employers resume business.

10 Some of the recovered workers will return to their dormitories, and the ITF will designate specific Blocks for Recovered Workers (BRWs) within these dormitories to house the workers. These BRWs will be thoroughly disinfected before the recovered workers move in. Within the BRWs, workers must observe enhanced safe distancing measures, and inter-mingling with residents of other blocks will be strictly prohibited. The ITF will work with dormitory operators to progressively create more BRWs, as part of the preparations to enable the dormitory population to eventually resume work safely.

11 The recovery plan will require dormitory operators to relocate some residents. We seek the cooperation of employers and workers so that the on-site CCFs, CRFs and BRWs can be set up quickly.

12 For dormitories that are less affected, we will adopt a combination of approaches including aggressive swabbing to contain the infections and isolation strategies. These will also better enable the resident workers to eventually be able to resume work safely.

13 Besides the existing dormitories, the ITF is also creating additional housing capacity for the workers. As a short-term measure, we have put in place arrangements such as floating accommodation, cruise ships, as well as sports halls. Beyond that, we will be building new dormitories to house some of the healthy and recovered workers.

Deployment of Medical Technology

14 In addition, the ITF will proliferate the use of medical technologies to enable more effective medical monitoring of the residents. Examples include:

- Pulse oximeters that can measure oxygen saturation and pulse rates. This enables workers to check on their own condition, and call for medical assistance if readings cross certain predetermined thresholds.
- Telemedicine providers for consultations during non-office hours, to complement the coverage of the medical posts.

PROVISION OF MEALS AND BASIC AMENITIES

15 The provision of meals every day to the 43 PBDs is running smoothly.

- Over 10 million meals have been served.
- Special meal runs have been organised for residents observing Ramadan.

- Meal delivery timings have improved, with meals served between 30 minutes to an hour after they arrive at the PBDs.
- Feedback on food quality and quantity also continues to improve for several reasons:
 - We have been working closely with dormitory operators and caterers to fine-tune the operational details for the entire process, from when the food is dispatched from the caterer's kitchen, to how the meals are effectively distributed across individual dormitories and workers.
 - We have been conducting taste tests with different groups of workers to ensure that the food suited their tastes, as the workers come from different countries.
 - We also arrange visits by the chefs to engage the workers and better understand their preferences

16 The residents' other needs are also being provided for:

- Residents can purchase items from the dormitory mini-marts through online orders and delivery of goods.
- More than 410,000 care packs have been distributed, containing daily essentials such as thermometers, hand sanitisers and masks.
- WIFI access has also been enabled across the dormitories and more than 200,000 data SIM cards have been distributed to the workers.
- More than 300 Tamil and Hindi movies channels are available for free viewing.

17 The ITF also arranged to celebrate festivities and observe major events with the foreign workers. For example, the Taskforce teamed up with the Hindu Endowments Board to distribute festive goodies and fast food treats to foreign workers during the Tamil and Bengali New Year on 14 April 2020. Special arrangements were made to welcome the month of Ramadan with Muslim foreign workers.

ENSURING SALARIES GET PAID AND PROVISION OF REMITTANCE SERVICES

18 Beyond their immediate needs, MOM has been proactively engaging employers to ensure that their migrant workers continue to be paid their salaries on time. Given the constraints of paying salaries in cash during this period, especially to foreign workers who are residing in dormitories gazetted as isolation areas, MOM has made it a requirement for employers to pay salaries via electronic means.

- Since MOM's engagement with employers, more are now paying their workers' salaries electronically. The number of workers that have bank accounts increased from 472,000 pre-circuit breaker period, to 521,000 currently.
- Of the 8,500 employers who submitted declarations to MOM, about 3% (or about 300 employers) indicated that they owed salaries to their workers. MOM is

actively tracking and engaging these employers to ensure that they eventually make payments to the workers. Seven employers are reportedly in financial difficulties and may not be able to pay their workers. For such cases, the Migrant Workers' Assistance Fund will step in to provide relief.

19 The Taskforce also facilitated access to remittance services, both physical and digital, so that workers can continue to remit money back to their families.

- To ensure workers at all 43 PBDs have access to remittance services, MOM worked closely with banks and remittance agents such as POSB, State Bank of India, GCC Exchange, Mass Express and Wandr, to provide multiple options for workers. These include setting up temporary manned remittance booths, deployment of self-service kiosks, and providing guidance on using e-remittance in workers' native languages.
- Employers have also been encouraged to conduct remittance on behalf of their workers. To make remittances faster and easier for workers living in dormitories, MAS has provided additional guidance to remittance service providers to facilitate such transactions.

20 **Whole-of-government resources** have been mobilised to provide **comprehensive support** to our migrant worker population. We are making **steady progress**. Most importantly, the workers are getting the care and support they need. We will continue to **put the worker's well-being first** as we adjust to the evolving COVID-19 situation.

<End of Release>

For media queries, please contact

Jon Nio

Assistant Director, Corporate Communications Department

DID: 6499 6008

Email: jon_nio@mom.gov.sg