

Delivered remarks by Minister for Manpower Dr Tan See Leng at the MTF press conference on 2 October 2021.

MOM has been working steadily to strengthen the resilience of our dormitories. We have vaccinated more than 90% of our migrant workers. We have also been consistently been monitoring new infections. The vast majority of infected workers are asymptomatic or display mild symptoms. They also do not require hospitalisation or oxygen support and are able to recover quickly on their own.

We will continue to maintain surveillance on migrant workers with acute respiratory illness (ARI) symptoms. This is in addition to wastewater testing (WWT) and ensuring workers comply with their schedule for the Rostered Routine Testing (RRT).

Nevertheless, there has been a rise in cases in the dormitories from less than 100 a day to over 500 a day in the last few days. This is the result of the Delta variant being more transmissible. The dormitories have not been insulated from the transmission of the virus, just like what we are experiencing in the community right now. Worthy of note is that the vast majority of infected workers who are fully vaccinated continue to be well and asymptomatic even when infected.

Therefore, we would have to take a different approach in managing infections at the dormitories. We will align public health measures for migrant workers in dormitories to the latest healthcare protocols for the community by the Ministry of Health. This will enable us to mitigate the risk of further transmissions in the dormitories in a more scalable and sustainable manner. It will also allow us to focus our attention on the symptomatic cases and those who need medical care without disrupting livelihoods and lives.

We will make adjustments to our healthcare protocols in three key areas. Firstly, we will increase the use of Fast and Easy Testing through Antigen Rapid Tests (ART) to make testing more convenient for both workers and their employers and yet allow for early identification of infections. We will shift away from polymerase chain reaction

(PCR) tests for asymptomatic individual and retain this only for symptomatic individuals. ARTs will be self-administered but peer or dorm supervised. The workers in the dorms have been trained, and instructional materials in their native languages have been made available.

Secondly, we will tighten contact tracing rings to focus on those who are most at risk of being exposed to the virus. In particular, the roommates of confirmed cases on PCR tests. The roommates and close contacts of those tested positive on ART will no longer be quarantined and disrupted from work. They will take an ART test and be asked to monitor their own health. If negative, they can continue to work and live as per usual. This will reduce work disruptions for migrant worker residents and their employers, while at the same time, safeguarding public health.

Thirdly, as the vast majority of infections are asymptomatic or have minor symptoms, we will allow fully vaccinated workers with no symptoms in some dormitories to self-isolate in dormitory recovery facilities, with access to monitoring through thermometers and oximeters, as well as telemedicine support, when they need it.

They will do ART tests every 3 days and can exit from dorm recovery as soon as their ART test result is negative. Symptomatic workers will be given a PCR test, and if positive, we will take more precautions and convey them to a community care facility (CCF) or to the hospital. By doing this, we ensure that every worker has appropriate care, and can focus medical resources and capacity for symptomatic or serious cases who need it most. We will also minimise life and work disruption for large number of close contacts.

With these new adjustments, employers and dormitory operators would have to adjust their workflows and processes as well. I would like to seek the support, patience, understanding and cooperation of employers and dormitory operators on this, as we navigate towards making our dormitories more resilient for our workers. Please be assured that MOM will be here to walk every step of the journey with you, and work through any operational challenges that you may encounter.

To our migrant worker brothers living in the dormitories, I would also like to assure them that they will continue to receive the appropriate medical care if and when they require it. We will also continue with the weekly community visits capped at 500 workers for now. We will continue to watch the situation closely, and progressively ease measures when we are able to do so.

MOM will continue to monitor the situation closely and finetune our strategy and health protocols from time to time to take care of the workers. The adjustments will enable us to reduce disruptions to migrant workers' lives and work whilst protecting public health.