

Five on Friday: 5 pandemic precautions that some of us may miss
In our weekly, light-hearted take on what's been making the headlines, self-professed homebody Low Zoey looks back at what some people may miss about safe management measures.

Low Zoey

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SINGAPORE: Like many people, I've long dreamt of the day that we could go back to "normal" after more than two years of pandemic limbo.

No more SafeEntry check-ins or COVID-19 swabs before travel!

Once my initial excitement died down, however, I realised that I may not have mentally prepared myself for this brave new world.

Singapore on Apr 26 reached this "major milestone" and moved ahead with its most significant relaxation of COVID-19 measures yet.

And although I know the eased restrictions will go a long way towards getting life back on track and boosting ailing businesses, I will have to admit that it feels just slightly bittersweet.

After years of having COVID-19 anxiety engraved into me and informing most of my life decisions and daily habits, some things might take a little getting used to again.

X Marks the Spot

We've all had to look over our shoulder to spot the safe distancing ambassador who had the unenviable task of reminding us to keep a 1m distance from another group.

But having a claim over maintaining a bubble of personal space is something that most of us probably already miss.

Let me jolt your memory. Prior to pandemic precautions, you may have been packed in like sardines in exercise studios where strangers would be within reach of rogue elbows and flying sweat.

Peak shopping hours - hello Orchard Road on a weekend - and special events were also guaranteed mosh pit situations, sometimes leading to flared tempers and even jail time.

While scrapping the safe-distancing rule is a much needed move for the many businesses that were hit hard by COVID-19, it'll take some time for us to adjust back to sharing our space.

Am I ready to sit shoulder to shoulder with other patrons when I dine out, close enough to hear every chew or hem of their throat? Or share armrest real estate in a cinema?

Deep breath.

Working from Home

The pandemic has forever changed the way we think about where and how we work.

While it took most of us some time in the early days of the outbreak to get used to a work from home setup - screaming kids and fiddling with Zoom backgrounds - we soon learnt to cope.

Up to a third of those recently polled by the Institute of Policy Studies felt that working from home on most days should be the new norm.

But there are certainly clear benefits to logging in-person hours with your colleagues. This includes fostering closer bonds, communicating clear instructions and a quick gossip over some pantry snacks.

However, you cannot deny the convenience of dodging the morning rush hour and working in your pyjamas.

Have you embraced the return to the office?

Reservations, Virtual Queues

While queueing still remains Singapore's unofficial sport, the pandemic has forced us to take a more virtual approach.

Stores and entertainment venues were quick to adapt, managing human traffic through booking systems in order to stagger arrivals.

Many eateries also pivoted away from exclusive "walk-ins only" policies in favour of reservations in order to avoid overcrowding and snaking lines.

Sure, it was a little more difficult to be spontaneous, but the trade-off meant guaranteeing your spot in advance without the need to anxiously wait around.

Will the relaxed measures herald a return to normalising physical queues once again?

Falling Sick Less Often

Prior to COVID-19, I remember catching the office flu once every few months. It would start with a small sneeze from the corner of the office. Then gradually my colleagues, one after the other, including myself would succumb.

But nearly everyone I know reported falling sick less often when mask-wearing was mandatory both indoors and outdoors. Hand washing and a keener eye for hygiene also contributed to this.

Health Ministry data showed a steep decline in confirmed influenza cases at polyclinics and general practitioners shortly after the "circuit breaker" period, when safety measures were at their tightest.

Civic-minded individuals were also quick to self-isolate when feeling unwell, quickly cutting off the chain of virus transmission.

While mask-wearing is now optional in outdoor settings and in some situations in the workplace, thankfully we're also now more mindful to keep a mask on when unwell.

Saying No to Large Gatherings

"I'm sorry but I don't think we should meet because there's a spike in COVID-19 community cases."

It will now be harder to hide behind the good excuse of COVID-19 the next time you want to duck out of a social engagement.

The pandemic did help us to normalise being homebodies and saying no, hunkering down and cancelling meet-ups at the slightest sign of a sniffle.

We are being responsible, right?

But with the lifting of the 10-pax limits for gatherings, several of my friends have also sheepishly admitted that they will no longer be able to dodge attending one too many weddings.

A few have also said they can no longer avoid their relatives during festive occasions like Chinese New Year.

Raise your hand if you too are guilty of this.

To all those who enjoy a good gathering, I am happy for you.

But as a representative of couch potatoes everywhere, if there's something the last two years has taught me, it's that it's ok to say NO. I'll stay at home for a little longer.