

Covid-19 Pandemic May End In 4-5 Years, Lawrence Wong Says We Must Emerge As Fairer Country After

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MustShareNews, 26 January 2021

Covid-19 Pandemic Increased Gap Between Haves & Have-Nots: Lawrence Wong

Many of us may have been wishing that 2021 would signal a return to a normalcy last observed before the Covid-19 pandemic began. However, even if the situation in Singapore improves, the pandemic may still last around 4-5 years.

This was what Education Minister Lawrence Wong said during a speech at a conference on Monday (25 Jan).

Also, even though the government aims to vaccinate most of Singapore's population by the 3rd quarter of 2021, vaccinating everyone around the world will take a while.

But Mr Wong said that once the pandemic is over, Singapore must become a fairer and more equal society.

Covid-19 pandemic may last 4-5 years

Mr Wong was making a speech at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)'s Singapore Perspectives 2021 conference.

Because vaccinating the world will neither be quick nor easy, Singaporeans will thus have to be prepared to live in "an acutely changed world", The Straits Times (ST) reports him as saying during the speech.

Masks and safe distancing will hence be a part of everyday life for the foreseeable future — maybe for a good part of next year. After all, "no one is safe until everyone is safe", he said.

Another factor in this is the vaccine roll-out, which might be complicated by new mutations such as the South African strain.

Moderna said on Monday (25 Jan) that their vaccine might have a diminished antibody response against that strain and are testing an additional booster shot. However, they note that the vaccine should still work against the emerging mutated strains.

"Rebooting" Singapore society after Covid-19 pandemic ends

Mr Wong also noted that there might be a reboot for Singapore following the pandemic's conclusion.

After the influenza pandemic in 1918, public spitting and spittons came to be seen as unsanitary, he cited as an example. We've seen more awareness of hygiene since Covid-19 emerged, but Mr Wong said that habits like handshaking may not go away anytime soon.

Humans seem to gravitate back towards physical contact even after a health crisis, he noted.

Another way Singapore may "reboot" is via taking a look at the impact on society.

In fact, he said this should be a priority — to become a fairer and more equal society.

Speaking of the pandemic impact affecting some more than others, he noted that the gulf between the haves and have-nots has widened.

Last year, many temporary measures were introduced to help the disadvantaged and vulnerable.

To that end, Singapore will shift to more strengthening of its social safety nets, but that has to be done in a sustainable manner over the long term, Channel NewsAsia (CNA) reports.

Pandemic affects some more than others

The pandemic might affect everyone, but it affects some more than others.

It's good to see that Mr Wong recognises this as something that needs to be addressed, and the pandemic has placed this issue at the forefront.

Mr Wong said he has trust that Singapore will emerge stronger from the pandemic, and hopefully it'll also result in a fairer society being built for future generations.

For now, we'll have to bunker down and wait for the pandemic to recede, as vaccination around the globe increases.