

Lawrence Wong: Increase in imported Covid-19 cases not due to more travellers

Anna Maria Romero

The Independent Singapore, 26 January 2021

Mr Wong said that the rise in imported cases is because of the elevated infection rate in many parts of the world

Education Minister Lawrence Wong said on Monday (Jan 25) that the recent increase in imported cases in the country is not because there are more travellers coming in to Singapore.

Mr Wong, who co-chairs the multi-ministry task force assigned to combat the pandemic, said instead that the rise in imported cases is because of the elevated infection rate in many parts of the world.

The Minister made these remarks at a dialogue that focuses on a post-pandemic Singapore organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

TODAY reports that a member of the audience had asked Mr Wong how Singapore intends to strike a balance and ensure its economic health with the risk of more infections coming into the country because of rising numbers of positive Covid-19 cases all over the world. After seeing daily infections drop down to the single digits late last year, more infections have been reported by the Ministry of Health (MOH) lately, with the vast majority being imported cases.

While the MOH's updates have shown that there were no locally transmitted cases of Covid-19 from Jan 23 to 26, there were a number of imported cases reported.

On Sunday (Jan 24) there were 48 imported cases, followed by 44 the next day. On Tuesday there were 14 new imported cases reported.

However, Mr Wong said at the dialogue that the number of travellers to Singapore has not increased.

He added, "Why have the numbers gone up? It's simply because the prevalence rate, the incidence rate, of the disease is much higher now. The virus is raging in countries everywhere."

The Minister pointed out that the bulk of travellers to Singapore are foreign domestic helpers and construction workers. Neither category has increased in the country "in recent times," he said.

Mr Wong further explained that those who come to Singapore must submit to a pre-departure test 72 hours before they land.

This, however, is not a foolproof method in weeding out those who are infected with Covid-19, as it sometimes takes the body time to incubate the virus before a person tests positive.

Hence the required two-week stay-home notices (SHN), he added. And travellers originating from some countries must serve 21-day SHNs away from the larger community.

Mr Wong added, "Those are precautions that we have been taking all along and we will continue to take... even as we have a continuous flow of people coming in, which is needed for Singapore's economy and society to function.

We do all that is necessary to take the necessary precautions and safeguards, and isolate these cases from seeping through our community."