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Singapore is experiencing a new wave of COVID-19, with authorities recording over 25,900 cases from May 5 to 11, 2024. Health Minister Ong Ye Kung advised the public to wear masks again on Saturday (May 18, 2024).

“We are at the beginning part of the wave where it is steadily rising,” Kung stated.

“So, I would say the wave should peak in the next two to four weeks, which means between mid- and end of June,” he told The Straits Times.

Significant surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations

The Ministry of Health (MOH) reported that the number of COVID-19 cases increased significantly, from 13,700 the previous week to 25,900 in the week of May 5 to 11.

Average daily hospitalisations rose to about 250 from 181 the previous week, while intensive care unit (ICU) cases remained low, increasing slightly from two to three daily.

To manage hospital capacity, public hospitals have been directed to reduce non-urgent elective surgeries and transfer suitable patients to transitional care facilities or home care through the Mobile Inpatient Care@Home program, which allows clinically suitable patients to be treated at home.

Vaccination urged for high-risk groups

Kung urged those at high risk of severe disease, including individuals aged 60 and above, medically vulnerable individuals, and residents of aged care facilities, to receive an additional COVID-19 vaccine dose if they haven’t done so in the last 12 months.

He warned that if COVID-19 cases double once more, Singapore will have 500 patients in the healthcare system, a manageable number. However, if cases double a second time, reaching 1,000 patients, it would place a significant burden on the hospital system.

“One thousand beds is equivalent to one regional hospital,” Ong noted. He emphasised that while no social restrictions are currently planned, the healthcare system must be prepared for the potential increase in cases.

Ong also mentioned that as a transport and communications hub, Singapore is likely to experience COVID-19 waves earlier than other cities. “So, COVID-19 is just something that we have to live with. Every year, we should expect one or two waves,” he said. Currently, the predominant COVID-19

variants globally are JN.1 and its sub-lineages, including KP.1 and KP.2, which account for over two-thirds of cases in Singapore.

KP.2, variant under monitoring

As of May 3, the World Health Organization classified KP.2 as a variant under monitoring. There are no indications that KP.1 and KP.2 are more transmissible or cause more severe disease than other variants.

The MOH urged the public to stay updated with vaccinations to protect against current and emerging strains. About 80% of the local population have completed their initial or additional dose but have not received a dose within the last year.

Since the start of COVID-19 vaccinations in 2020-2021, vaccines have been consistently proven safe and effective in preventing severe illness.

Billions of doses have been administered globally, with safety monitoring confirming the vaccines' safety and no long-term concerns. Adverse effects have generally occurred shortly after vaccination, including with mRNA vaccines. -www.financialexpress.com, **May 18, 2024**