Coronavirus Singapore/Vaccines

World Economic Forum cancels Aug meeting in S'pore

Lim Min Zhang

(WEF) is cancelling its special annual meeting that was sched-August, with organisers citing the meeting will instead take place in ing with a broad span of interna- able world. But ultimately, the early next month. uncertain travel outlook and new the first half of next year. The final tional participants," MTI said in re- health and safety of everyone con-Covid-19 variants as reasons.

"Regretfully, the tragic circumstances unfolding across geograthe situation later this summer. phies, an uncertain travel outlook, differing speeds of vaccination rollnew variants combine to make it imGovernment that due to the continsues of global concern," it added.

"This is despite the excellent supof Singapore," it added.

The WEF said its next annual location and date will be determined based on an assessment of

planned," the WEF said yesterday. in Singapore from Aug 17 to 20.

sponse to media queries. "We will continue to work actively with the World Economic Fopossible to realise a global meeting uing global uncertainties caused by Professor Klaus Schwab, the WEF announced last December night IISS has informed the Govern- • Additional reporting by Justin Ong

demic, particularly for a large meet-

with business, government and Covid-19, it will be cancelling its spe- WEF's founder and executive civil society leaders from all over cial annual meeting for this year, chairman, said of the cancellation: end May, and again to August. the world at the scale which was which was scheduled to take place "It was a difficult decision, particularly in view of the great interest of "The Singapore Government our partners to come together not tional Institute of Strategic Studies port provided by the Government fully appreciates the challenges just virtually but in person, and to (IISS) said the think-tank remains caused by the ongoing global pan-contribute to a more resilient, more inclusive and more sustain-

cerned is our highest priority." The WEF's annual meeting, tradi-The Ministry of Trade and Indus- rum and other key international or- land, in January, gathers top public the world planning to attend our most consideration," it added. try (MTI) said vesterday that the ganisations to promote collabora- and private sector leaders to ad- event," the spokesman said. out and the uncertainty around WEF had informed the Singapore tions between stakeholders on is- dress pressing global issues. This vear's special meeting, which the the Ministry of Defence said last

would be in Singapore, would have ment that it remains committed to taken place at Marina Bay Sands, holding the security dialogue. with over 1,000 delegates. "We are encouraged by the posi-The WEF had shifted the dates tive response to invitations to SLD for the meeting twice, from mid to 2021, which underscores the strong commitment of government leaders in addressing security chal-In a separate statement vester-

day, a spokesman for the Internalenges even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic," Mindef said. "Nevertheless, as the Covid-19 situation is fluid and continues to on track to convene the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) here evolve... the Singapore Government will continue to monitor the "The World Economic Forum's delocal and global Covid-19 situation cision does not affect our plans. We and make the necessary adjusthave a full line-up of ministers and ments. In doing so, the health and tionally held in Davos, Switzer- other senior leaders from around safety of everyone will be the fore-

Responding to media queries,

THE STRAITS TIMES | TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021

Form your own social bubble and stick to it, says NCID director

Timothy Goh

could be more dangerous than it yound what government dictates". was just before the circuit breaker last year, and people must go text with NCID, which confirmed above and beyond what is being that Prof Lye had written it. asked for to keep safe, said Associate Professor David Lye of the stay home, avoid crowded places for coronavirus patients, how the in dormitories among migrant get sick enough to require oxygen. National Centre for Infectious Dis-

TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021 | THE STRAITS TIMES

In a message that was circulating social bubble" consisting of those Most recently, he co-authored

units (ICU), and over 1,000 people

in hospital or community facilities.

But he said we should heed Prof

The four variants of concern, all

precautions as we are now facing

now found here, are more easily

numbers we are facing today may

not be as big as they were last year,

Professor Leo Yee Sin, executive

transmissible, but there also seems

transmitted, so although the

the danger remains very real.

variant is not only more

director of NCID, said the B1617

Today, we have fewer than 500

people being monitored and two

people in ICU."

Lye's suggestion to take

more virulent viruses.

on WhatsApp and other social me- who are committed to socialising dia platforms yesterday, the direc- only within the bubble. tor of NCID's Infectious Disease Research and Training Office called on those here to "do much more be- also a senior consultant at Tan nated as the recent outbreak at outbreak at Changi Airport may be sick people cannot get a bed and

people to form their own "small situation here

"For many, this is your immediate family," said Prof Lye, who is

Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) De-The Straits Times verified the partment of Infectious Diseases. Prof Lye has co-authored multiand big groups, he also called for virus may be transmitted and the

Prof Lye is also president of the College of Physicians, Singapore and Society of Infectious Disease In yesterday's viral message, he

said that people should ensure they wear a mask over their mouth and nose even when walking in parks, and that more should get vacci-TTSH showed that not enough vulnerable old people have done so. Prof Lye noted that the situa-

He added that 40 per cent to 50 buried. workers. This was contained with lockdowns – although this took a and treatment, and expanded test-

spread to the community from

the outbreak at the airport may "If a country is overwhelmed

However, this year, the many cases with no links suggest that the like India, many will die, including spread to the community from the "wide and far", he said.

per cent of those infected have no ple papers on Covid-19, covering tion in Singapore last year was symptoms and can be equally infec- want to see you in NCID or any of Apart from exhorting people to topics such as potential treatments bad because of the huge outbreak tious, while another 10 per cent can the hospitals. "Yes, we have effective vaccines

masks and vaccinations. "This is serious." He concluded: "If you want to keep your family safe, you need to listen and do the above.

dead bodies can't get cremated or

working against these efforts are

the new variants which originated

from India, which infected TTSH

and Changi Airport staff despite

"My colleague(s) and I don't

ST has approached NCID and Prof Lye for further comments.

ing capacity," he pointed out, but timgoh@sph.com.sg

News analysis

Vaccinating more people by spacing out doses can slow spread of virus

It is unlikely to affect efficacy and downsides are mainly administrative, says expert



Salma Khalik

Senior Health Correspondent

experts say that giving one dose of the vaccine to as many people as possible – instead of two doses to fewer people - is the right thing

Currently, the two doses are given three or four weeks apart. On Sunday, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said Singapore is studying the possibility of giving the second vaccine dose six to eight weeks

This will allow more people to get at least one vaccine dose. Singapore is unable to speed up the vaccination process any other way because "the pace is limited by the pace of the supply arriving in He also pointed out that older,

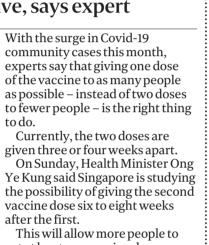
more vulnerable people have already been vaccinated, and the programme is now moving to younger cohorts. Professor Ooi Eng Eong, an

diseases at the Duke-NUS Medical School, said one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccine used here gives people 70 per cent to 90 per cent protection from the

protection against severe illness and death to about 95 per cent. being protected, but should also reduce the spread of the virus in

The large number of unlinked community cases – 17 on Sunday not known where these people

Of the 38 community infections reported on Sunday, only 13 had peen quarantined prior to detection. It is not known how many people have been infected by the other 25, who were roaming freely in the community.



after the first.

expert on emerging infectious

The second dose raises the

Having more people vaccinated would not only mean more people the community.

and 11 yesterday – is worrying, as it is difficult to stop the spread if it is caught the virus from.



A vaccination centre at Hong Kah North CC. One expert estimated that if Singapore extends the interval for those due for their second jab in the next three weeks, another half a million people could get their first jabs. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

There could also be many more undetected infected people, who are asymptomatic or only mildly sick, passing the virus on to others. Giving more people one jab can help reduce such community

Prof Ooi said a study in Britain und that transmission to household members by infected healthcare workers, who have had a single dose, was a third lower than among those who were not

It fell to half once both doses had been administered, so it is still important to get two doses. Explaining why those given one vaccine jab are less likely to spread the disease, Prof Ooi said the

immune response could include neutralising some of the virus, and thus lowering the infectious fraction that could be transmitted

"It could also lead to shorter period of infection and hence, also lower the rate of ransmission," he added. Britain was the first country to space out the first and second doses. It did that towards the end

of last year, and was criticised by those who said it would diminish the protective effects of the

statistics at the National

With hindsight, Associate Professor Alex Cook, an expert in infectious disease modelling and University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said Britain's move "was one of the smartest decisions" and hastened the end of the winter wave there. He said it was a good time for

Singapore to follow that example. Doing some back-of-the-envelope

calculations, senior infectious diseases specialist, Professor Dale Fisher of the National University Hospital, said: "If Singapore expands the interval for those due for second jabs in the next three weeks, it will allow another half a million people to get their first jabs." As at May 10, more than three

 $million\,vaccine\,doses\,have\,been$ administered, with 1.85 million people having at least one dose, and 1.28 million people fully vaccinated.

In fact, spacing out the doses longer could actually make the vaccine more effective. And if people knew that, they might not mind the move, said Prof Fisher.

An article in Nature journal last week carried the results of a study by Public Health England on 175 people over the age of 80 who were given the second Pfizer jab either three weeks or 11 to 12 weeks after the first.

It said: "The peak antibody levels were 3.5 times higher in those who waited 12 weeks for their booster shot than were those in people who waited only three weeks. Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang, an infectious diseases expert at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said: "In places where the virus is spreading rapidly, providing the first dose of the vaccine to more

people will prevent severe infections and save many lives "This may not be so applicable to Singapore but nonetheless, the downsides are primarily administrative, and not clinical or

He added that although there is no data on the effects of stponing the second dose by nore than 12 weeks, historical data from other vaccines shows that a slightly longer delay is likely compromise vaccine efficacy". The important thing, the experts aid, is for everyone who is eligible

o get vaccinated. Prof Cook noted that many of the infected patients in the Tan Γock Seng Hospital cluster had not been vaccinated.

He asked if there would even have been a cluster in the first place had more of the patients been vaccinated, especially the one who likely introduced the virus to the hospital.

Prof Hsu stressed that getting one dose will protect the one vaccinated, and also reduce the spread of the virus should the person get infected – so it is a good move for both the individual and

Hence, delaying the second jab in order to have more people getting at least one dose could pull Singapore back from the brink of a second wave of infections in the Associate Professor David Lye,

director of the Infectious Disease Research and Training Office at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), had felt impelled to send out a message warning that "our current status is likely more

Singaporeans adjust to stricter curbs in phase two dangerous than just before circuit breaker (CB) last year". Prof Cook disagreed: "On the day we went into CB last year, we had about 30 people in intensive care

Yesterday marked the first work day of Singapore's phase two (heightened alert), with most employees

switching to remote working under new, stricter safe management measures that will

be in place until

June 13.

to be higher viral shedding in respiratory secretion, and the time needed for infection to occur appears to be shorter. She added: "Infection may occur in vaccinated individuals, but they appear to have a milder outcome that is not progressing to

pneumonia. However, we need time to further observe this." Prof Cook estimates the RO or transmission rate in Singapore today to be 40 per cent higher than it was just before the circuit breaker in April last year. This is why Singapore may want to hasten the move to space out the

population to get vaccinated. At least half the people here need to be vaccinated for herd immunity to kick in. The higher the number who are vaccinated, the greater the protection for the rest, some of whom are ineligible for vaccinations because of their age or medical conditions. Said Dr Asok Kurup, chair of the Chapter of Infectious Disease Physicians: "It is imperative to get as many people vaccinated. particularly those who are at higher risk but have not received it

larger proportion of the

either asymptomatic or mildly sick, whereas the reverse is true for the unvaccinated." Added Prof Cook: "I know some of us may have been putting off getting vaccinated because it wasn't so urgent earlier - but it is urgent now. If you have been offered vaccination, please don't delay in stepping forward for it." Prof Leo also asked people to adhere to strict safe management measures. "The virus is

transmitting from human to

human," she pointed out.

yet. Vaccinated individuals are

salma@sph.com.sg

The usually busy Orchard Road appeared devoid of motorists and shoppers at around 5.30pm yesterday. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG



Customers queueing to buy food for takeaway at Market Street Interim Hawker Centre during lunchtime yesterday. Under the new rules, dining in is not allowed. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

UK, France among countries that have delayed 2nd jab

Eileen Ng **Regional Correspondent**

The four variants of

concern, all now found

transmitted, so although

today may not be as big

the numbers we are facing

as they were last year, the

danger remains very real.

here, are more easily

A number of countries around the ing the second dose of the zine Science News. Covid-19 vaccine as they rush to of-

the coronavirus.

ond dose varies between vaccines. from as early as 21 days to up to 12 "You will save far, far more lives

sands more lives – giving those world", said Vaccines Minister Nadextra vaccine doses to people for him Zahawi.

tected, than using that same ca- of those have had the second dose. pacity (for) giving people their second shot and getting them its restrictions from yesterday, al-Medicine told bi-weekly maga-

considered an unusual step to de- weeks between the first and sec-A longer interval between lay the second dose of the vaccine ond shots of the Pfizer and Modshots has not been tested in cliniby up to 12 weeks to prioritise ernavaccines. cal trials. but some scientists said first jabs to as many people as the move to delay was sensible, possible. The country is dispensing doses means that more people will given the emergence of several three types of vaccines - Pfizer, receive their first dose sooner, prohighly transmissible variants of Moderna and home-grown AstraZeneca.

The move followed a spike in cases last December and in January, driven mostly by the B117 variant. That policy resulted in Britain being "one of the countries with the whenever possible. - on the order of tens of thou- highest vaccine uptake rates in the

from 85 to 95 (per cent efficacy)," lowing indoor dining to return in Dr Robert Wachter of the Univerpubs, cafes and restaurants, while venues were reopened for the first time in months. In January, Britain was among Likewise, Denmark approved fer protection to more people as the first to take what was then last month a delay of up to six

This has allowed Britain to ease

Increasing the gap between viding for wider immunity in the population, said the Danish Health

However, it also cautioned that the original interval of three to four weeks should be followed Neighbouring Norway followed suit, extending the interval between the first and second doses of der 65 years old.

You will save far, far more lives - on the order of tens of thousands sity of California's Department of cinemas, museums and sports more lives – giving those extra vaccine doses to people for their first shot, getting them from zero to 85 per cent protected, than using that same capacity (for) giving people their second shot and getting them from 85 to 95 (per cent efficacy).

DR ROBERT WACHTER of the University of California's

their first shot, getting them Almost 36 million people have the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines The Institute of Public Health to receive their first jabs by July

decision would allow all adults from zero to 85 per cent pro- had their first dose, and 20 million from six to 12 weeks for adults un- and Health Ministry said the 25, up from the previous estimate work; they give a very high level of

of Aug 29. "Increasing the interval will allow many more to be vaccinated earlier. This will prevent serious illness and death, and reduce the overall level of infection in society," Health Minister Bent Hoeie was quoted as saying.

In France, since last Friday, the authorities have delayed the second Covid-19 jab from four weeks to six weeks to speed up its inocula-"(It) will allow us to vaccinate more quickly without reducing pro-

tection," Health Minister Olivier Veran told JDD newspaper. In the United States, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance to allow up to 42 days between doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to make it more flexible for people to get their second shots. Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunisation released a

guidance in March that

allowed provinces to extend the

time between the first and second doses to a maximum of four months - if vaccines are in short supply. "The important thing that we have learnt is that these vaccines

lasts for many months," Yahoo News Canada quoted Dr Bonnie Henry, a British Columbia health officer, as saying. "Extending this second dose provides very high, real-world protection to more people sooner."

protection, and that protection

Canada has been hit by a third wave of the pandemic, compounded by a slow vaccine roll-out due to supply issues and shipment delays. Many Canadian provinces remain in extended lockdowns, even as the country ramps up its vaccination campaign. However, not all experts are con-

second dose, worried that the presence of partially immunised people could fuel more dangerous variants. Dr Paul Bieniasz, a retrovirologist at The Rockefeller University, was quoted as saying by Scientific American magazine: "The virus is going to evolve in response to antibodies, irrespective of how we administer vaccines.

vinced about the need to delay the

"The question is: Would we be accelerating that evolution by creating country-size populations of individuals with partial immunity?"

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Empty seats – typically a rare sight during peak morning hours – on an MRT train travelling along the East-West Line yesterday at 8.30am. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH



Swab testing being carried out yesterday at White Sands mall for all mall tenants and staff as some visitors to the mall had tested positive for Covid-19 in the past two weeks. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM