

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR LEO YEE SIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CENTRE FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES AT THE NCID SECOND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AND LAUNCH OF THE NCID GALLERY AT 11.45AM ON TUESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT NCID CARES**

---

Mr Heng Swee Keat, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies

Mr Tan Tee How, Chairman, National Healthcare Group Board

Associate Professor Kenneth Mak, Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health

Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Chief Health Scientist, Ministry of Health

Professor Philip Choo, Group CEO, National Healthcare Group

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentleman

Good morning

## **I Introduction**

1. Welcome to the second anniversary celebration of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). We are delighted that Mr Heng Swee Keat, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies could join us today to commemorate NCID's second anniversary and to officially launch The NCID Gallery.
2. Last year at this time as we celebrated our first anniversary, Singapore was in Phase Two of post-Circuit Breaker. Through consistent and coordinated government policies and national effort and strong support from the community, transmission of SARS-CoV-2 was brought under control. This allowed NCID to return partially to providing routine care for other infectious diseases, while maintaining our readiness to respond to any surge in COVID-19 cases.
3. NCID's integrated functions of clinical services, public health, research, training and education and community engagement play a key role in the diagnosis and management of infectious diseases. This has enabled the centre to respond

swiftly in a proactive and coordinated manner to the management of COVID-19 since January 2020.

4. As we embark on another year, it is important to acknowledge that the fight against COVID-19 still continues as we progress toward an eventual state of endemic COVID-19.

## **II Delta variant and ongoing challenges**

5. Ever since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed locally last January, the virus has continued to mutate and evolve, some of which include the Alpha, Beta, Gamma and now the Delta variant which is highly transmissible and has resulted in the rise in the number of community cases in recent months. Here are some observations NCID and our partners from public healthcare, research and academic institutions have made through our continuing research on SARS-CoV-2. The Delta variant possess many advantageous features which aid its transmission. Firstly, it causes high viral shedding and prolonged viral shedding among the unvaccinated which can amplify transmission in all routes, such as aerosol, person to person contact and fomite transmission. This demonstrated the risk of transmission through routine activities such as talking and singing. Secondly, there is silent transmission of the virus and individuals can have no or mild symptoms. Thirdly, it has the ability to evade our pre-existing immunity and an enhanced ability to attach itself and gain entry to the respiratory tract.
6. Among the unvaccinated cases, the Delta variant is associated with more severe disease with a higher proportion of cases needing supplementary oxygen compared to the wildtype in 2020. Comparing the Delta variant with other variants of concern, our findings demonstrated that more cases with the Delta variant needed intensive care even after adjusting for age. On a positive note, vaccine has significantly reduced severe illness and a six-fold reduction in the need for intensive care.

## **III Managing COVID-19 patients together with public health programmes**

7. It has been a tango with the virus over the last 20 months and as the virus evolves, we have had to adjust our steps along the way. In September 2020, nearly half

of our wards were full managing both COVID-19 and routine infectious diseases cases. Today, all wards in NCID are in operation concurrently managing COVID-19 cases and providing routine care.

8. It is timely to launch The NCID gallery and take the time to reflect on the past experiences of managing other infectious disease outbreaks. SARS-CoV-2 will not be the last. Through The NCID Gallery and our community space NCID Cares, we hope to reach out to the community and together take on the challenges of battling infectious diseases.
9. Besides clinical care, NCID's various public health programmes have made significant contributions in the continuing fight against other infectious diseases like HIV and tuberculosis and antimicrobial resistance.
10. The National HIV Programme introduced and implemented NCID's first national recommendations for antiretroviral and pre-exposure prophylaxis prescribing. The National TB Programme maintained its contact tracing operations throughout this COVID-19 period with additional large-scale screening activities implemented when necessary. For example, an outreach screening was conducted in Hougang in October 2020, after a cluster of four TB cases were detected at a HDB residential block. Over a span of three days, the team successfully engaged more than 90% of the households.
11. In the area of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), NCID was appointed as grant intermediary for the One Health Antimicrobial Resistance Research Programme (OHARP) in December 2020 to administer and commission multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial studies in One Health AMR research. The Antimicrobial Resistance Coordinating Office has actively participated in regional and international AMR surveillance programmes, and expanded its local private and public partnerships to monitor trends in AMR and utilisation in Singapore. We look forward to many exciting and engaging events to raise awareness of AMR in the healthcare sector and the community as part of World Antimicrobial Awareness Week in November 2021.

#### **IV Winners of the “Heroes Amongst Us” video competition**

12. To celebrate the dedication of the nursing workforce in Singapore as part of Nurses’ Day 2021, the NCID Nursing department organised the “Heroes Amongst Us” video competition. The competition was open to all healthcare institutions in Singapore and required participants to submit a video that portrayed nurses as everyday heroes in the face of outbreak management. Thirty-eight video entries were received. We will be awarding the prizes to the top three winners later. This competition serves as a timely reminder of the importance of the nursing workforce and their courageous contribution during pandemic.

#### **V Conclusion**

13. We are thankful for the guidance and foresight of the Ministry of Health and the government in setting up NCID to strengthen the nation’s ability to respond swiftly and effectively to infectious disease outbreaks. As we continue the battle against COVID-19, the mission of NCID remains unchanged – to protect the people of Singapore from infectious diseases. I would like to thank all NCID staff for your service and personal sacrifices in upholding NCID’s mission, even if at times it meant going beyond the call of duty. You are all deeply appreciated.

14. The battle against the virus will not stop here as Singapore progresses towards a state of endemic COVID-19. We are thankful to all our colleagues from Tan Tock Seng Hospital and all public health institutions for your support and encouragement. As the saying goes, “If you want to run fast, run alone. If you want to run far, run together.” NCID will continue to work with our partners in the healthcare sector, academic and research institutions and the community to safeguard Singapore’s public health.

Thank you.