

Free TB screening for residents of Bt Merah block after 7 cases found

Precautionary move comes after cluster detected between February and March

Wallace Woon

Residents, stallholders and shop owners in Block 2 Jalan Bukit Merah have been urged by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to go for a voluntary screening for tuberculosis (TB).

MOH said yesterday that the screenings will be conducted free of charge, and will take place from Friday to May 31.

The screening is a precautionary measure after a cluster of seven individuals there were diagnosed with TB between February and March this year, MOH said.

The individuals reside in seven different units in the block, said MOH, who was notified of the cluster on March 2.

For the convenience of residents, mobile teams will go to their homes to carry out the screening.

Those working in the area, or whose homes are deemed unsuitable for the screening, can go to a screening station located at Queenstown Hock San Zone Residents' Committee (RC) Centre at Block 3 Jalan Bukit Merah.

Those who have lived or worked in the block from October 2020 will be contacted by MOH via phone from next month and offered screening at the TB Control Unit (TBCU) in Moulmein Road.

Former residents who have lived in the block from October 2020 and wish to be screened may also call the TBCU Contact Clinic appointment hotline on 6258-4430.

MOH said that the risk of transmission is very low between a TB



patient and individuals who are not close contacts, and added that screening will not be necessary for those who occasionally visit the block and its surrounding areas.

Of the seven TB cases, two have died of causes not related to TB, three are undergoing treatment, and the last two have already completed their treatment.

MOH said that individuals with TB rapidly become non-infectious once they begin treatment and,

hence, the cases are not an ongoing public health risk.

A genetic analysis of the individuals done last month revealed a similar genetic make-up in the cases, suggesting the cases are linked to at least one common source.

MOH said its investigations revealed that the individuals did not identify each other as close contacts. No other common links were found aside from the fact that the people live in the same block.

When The Sunday Times spoke to residents and shopkeepers yesterday, many said they were appreciative of the screening efforts.

Madam Ang, the owner of a furniture shop on the ground floor who declined to give her full name, said that staff from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) had given out letters earlier in the day informing residents and shopkeepers of the situation.

The 57-year-old shopkeeper

said: "They (NCID staff) encouraged us to make an appointment so that we would not have to queue."

"I was afraid at first because they will have to draw my blood but it is still good to be cautious."

The daughter of an elderly woman, who both declined to be identified, said NCID staff had come by at around 11am and that the MP for the area, Mr Eric Chua, had also explained the situation.

Coffee shop assistant Tan Yah

GOOD TO BE CAUTIOUS

They (NCID staff) encouraged us to make an appointment so that we would not have to queue. I was afraid at first because they will have to draw my blood but it is still good to be cautious.



MADAM ANG, the owner of a furniture shop who declined to give her full name, on her appreciation of the screening efforts.

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

I've made an appointment for the screening when it's convenient for me after work. I haven't heard of TB in such a long time, but I think there's nothing to worry about.



MR TAN YAH KWANG, a coffee shop assistant who has been a resident of the block for more than three decades.

National Centre for Infectious Diseases executive director Leo Yee Sin talking to Madam Ho Lin Har, a resident of Block 2, Jalan Bukit Merah, yesterday. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Kwang, 57, said he was unaware of the TB situation in his block until he was given the letter by NCID staff. A resident of the block for more than three decades, he said: "I've made an appointment for the screening when it's convenient for me after work."

"I haven't heard of TB in such a long time, but I think there's nothing to worry about."

wallacewoon@sph.com.sg



Keane Tan
Three-time award winner
UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore)

Visit Keane's solo exhibition at the UOB Art Gallery, UOB Plaza 1 from now till 17 June 2022.

Be the one to inspire



Share your story with us on canvas

The 41st UOB Painting of the Year country winner will receive US\$25,000 and a chance to compete for the coveted UOB Southeast Asian Painting of the Year award and a residency programme at the renowned Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.

This competition is open to all established and aspiring artists who are Singapore citizens or permanent residents. Submit your entries at UOBandArt.com or by scanning the code below.



Submissions close on 31 July 2022

More details at UOBandArt.com

Follow us on:



RIGHT BY YOU