

- Virus

Mild fever or sore throat? You must still seek help, say docs

It is better to see a doctor preferably on the day the symptoms appear

The Straits Times · 31 May 2021 · A6 · Joyce Teo Senior Health Correspondent askST If you have a question, e-mail us at askst@sph.com.sg joyceteo@sph.com.sg

The Covid-19 clusters that have formed here have been linked to variants of concern circulating around the world.

Despite reminders and Singapore being in a state of heightened alert, some people have ignored a fever or other respiratory symptoms for a few days before seeing a doctor, only to find out later that they have Covid-19.

The Straits Times looks at what you should do if you are feeling unwell.

Q If I have a mild fever or sore throat, should I see a doctor or stay home to monitor my condition?

A Doctors say that those who feel unwell should seek help, even if their symptoms appear mild.

“Anyone with a cough, runny nose, sore throat, body ache, diarrhoea and headache, with or without fever, regardless of the severity, should see a doctor,” said Dr James Cheong, a general practitioner (GP) at C3 Family Clinic @ Aljunied Crescent.

This means that anyone with a mild fever or sore throat, for instance, should seek help, he added.

“In the current situation, where we are seeing increased community cases, it is even more important for people to see a doctor when they are unwell,” he said.

This is particularly so, as persons with Covid-19 infection may experience only mild symptoms.

Dr Tseng Hsien Cho, a family physician at Raffles Medical Group, said Covid-19 symptoms that people should watch out for include breathing difficulties, cough, fever above 37.5 deg C, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, diarrhoea, body ache or runny nose.

Anyone with one of these symptoms should seek help early, preferably on the day the symptoms appear, he said.

“Call the clinic ahead of your visit to ensure that it is open and to give the clinic staff a heads-up on your symptoms,” he added.

Q Do I have to do a swab test at the GP?

A You would be advised to undergo a swab test if you display Covid-19 symptoms, or if the doctor suspects possible exposure to Covid-19 from the initial screening questions and physical examinations, said Dr Tseng.

Q Will the doctor ask me to do more than one Covid-19 test?

A For fast detection of possible cases, the latest testing strategy is to do both an antigen rapid test (ART) and the gold-standard polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, which involves a nasopharyngeal swab.

The ART test is relatively less accurate than the PCR test, but there is less discomfort for the ART test as the swab stick enters only 1cm deep into the nostril, said Dr Tseng. The test also has a much shorter turnaround time of around 20 to 30 minutes, he added.

The shorter turnaround time allows the authorities to take swifter public health action for those who test positive in the ART test.

Those who take the ART test will still have to take the PCR test – which is more accurate but takes time to generate a result at a laboratory – to confirm the results.

Q Do all GPs offer these Covid-19 tests?

A No, not all GPs offer Covid-19 tests. These tests are offered at Public Health Preparedness Clinics (PHPCs) that offer the Swab and Send Home (Sash) service, polyclinics, emergency departments and regional swab centres.

You can go to sgcovidcheck.gov.sg to input your symptoms and get recommendations on the next steps to take, or straight to flu.gowhere.gov.sg to locate the nearest GP clinic that provides subsidised swab tests and treatment.

All Sash clinics are PHPCs, so you would be able to get subsidised treatment and tests if eligible, but not all PHPCs are Sash clinics.

As at May 21, there were about 1,000 PHPCs with more than 630 of them in the Sash programme.

Dr Tseng said: “If the clinic is not equipped to conduct swab tests, the doctor should give a referral to a clinic that does swab tests.”

At the clinic, you will also be given a five-day stay-home medical certificate and treatment for your symptoms, he said.

Q Is there a special price if I seek help for Covid-19 symptoms or take the Covid-19 tests?

A Singaporeans, permanent residents and eligible work permit holders (excluding foreign domestic workers) pay a flat subsidised rate of \$10 for the treatment of respiratory infections (for example, the common cold) at PHPCs and polyclinics.

Pioneer Generation and Merdeka Generation seniors pay a lower rate of \$5. Public assistance cardholders need not pay. The goods and services tax will be fully absorbed by the Government.

The cost of consultation, medication and investigations (including any Covid-19 swab test) provided at each visit to treat your respiratory infection will be covered under this fee. The ART and PCR swab tests, if advised by doctors, are fully funded by the Government. Otherwise, a pre-departure PCR swab test can cost from \$150 to \$200, while a pre-event ART swab test can cost from \$30 to \$60, said Dr Tseng.

Q If I go to a PHPC to seek help for my headache or diarrhoea, and I'm not given a Covid-19 test, can I still pay the subsidised rate?

A Your rate will be subsidised only if you are diagnosed with acute respiratory infection. If not, you will have to pay the usual rate, though this comes with the assurance that you do not have Covid-19.

Dr Cheong said: "It important for the patient to come forward early to be evaluated if he feels unwell. The wait-and-see approach may not be a good idea at this time when the virus is spreading in the community."

Dr Tseng said the new B1617 variant has a higher transmission rate and early diagnosis would help to limit contact and spread of the disease.