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## Covid-19 • Vital for seniors to get jabs: Experts

Surging Covid-19 cases here mean it is crucial for seniors to get their vaccinations soon, while holdouts need to relook their stance urgently, health experts here said.

Unvaccinated seniors in nursing homes are at particular risk of severe illness should they get infected, with experts warning that more clusters are likely to arise in aged care facilities given the communal living environment and the footfall of staff changing shifts.

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# Jabs a matter of life and death for seniors: Experts

Vaccination vital amid rising Covid-19 cases as clusters likely to form in nursing homes

Malavika Menon

With Covid-19 cases rising in the community, getting vaccinated is now a matter of life and death for seniors here, experts said.

Health experts warn that more clusters are likely to form in nursing homes, given the close proximity among seniors who are residents in these homes and the regular footfall of staff changing shifts.

Professor Dale Fisher, a senior infectious diseases consultant at the National University Hospital, urged relatives of unvaccinated seniors in nursing homes to review their stance and get their older kin vaccinated as soon as possible, as they face a higher risk of severe illness should they get infected.

"Efforts may need to be stepped up to keep nursing homes safe as infection can spread easily among the seniors, given the transmission in the community," Dr Fisher said.

"Those with comorbidities who are unvaccinated should get their two doses over the next month, and those who are already vaccinated should opt for a booster shot," he added.

Precautionary measures have been stepped up at nursing homes after more than 100 Covid-19 cases were detected among staff and residents of aged-care facilities over the past week.

There were 1,012 new cases in Singapore on Sunday, the second

day in a row that new Covid-19 cases passed the four-digit mark.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) announced earlier this month that all visits to residential care homes would be suspended until Oct 11 to minimise the risk of transmission.

A spokesman for Jamiyah Nursing Home, which reported 15 cases – three staff and 12 residents – said the premises, in West Coast Drive, have undergone a few rounds of deep cleaning and staff are donning full personal protection gear to prevent transmission.

A spokesman for Windsor Convalescent Home, which reported 10 cases comprising one staff member and nine residents on Sunday, said the home, which is in Pasir Panjang Road, has worked closely with MOH and the Agency for Integrated Care to test residents and staff for Covid-19.

"We understand that this development may cause concern. We seek your understanding to give us the space and time to focus on the health and well-being of our residents and staff, as that is our top priority," she said.

Residential homes for the elderly, as well as welfare homes and homes for those with disabilities, have previously reported Covid-19 clusters.

The first nursing home to report Covid-19 infections was the Lee Ah Mooi Old Age Home in Thomson Lane in April 1 last year.

During the circuit breaker period last year, all homes serving

## Covid-19 cases reported in nursing homes

Nursing home	Residents with Covid-19	Staff with Covid-19	Total
Woodlands Care Home	11	1	12
Windsor Convalescent Home	9	1	10
All Saints Home Jurong East	11	4	15
Jamiyah Nursing Home	12	3	15
Orange Valley Nursing Home (Simei)	17	0	17
Ren Ci @ Bukit Batok Street 52	23	9	34 (including 2 who are household contacts of cases)

NOTE: Numbers are based on available figures from MOH reports as at Sept 19.

Source: MINISTRY OF HEALTH STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

the elderly, including adult disability homes, nursing homes and welfare homes, underwent mass testing for all residents and staff to detect infections early and ring-fence any clusters.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit at the Nanyang Technological University yesterday, Singapore's director of Medical Services Kenneth Mak said the Government was working to increase the percentage of vaccinated clients and residents in nursing homes.

He said: "We have made quite significant inroads, many of them are vaccinated now, so that is good, but we could do better because there are still some who have not been vaccinated, often because either they object themselves or their families have not agreed to give permission for their loved one to be vaccinated."

Infectious diseases expert Leong Hoe Nam cited staff changing shifts

at nursing homes, communal activities and visits by next of kin as some reasons clusters could have surfaced at nursing homes prior to the suspension of visits.

Dr Leong said that those who are unvaccinated should complete their vaccination as soon as possible, not just to protect themselves, but also to ensure that the healthcare system does not become overwhelmed.

"The statistics speak clearly: Those who are not vaccinated require hospital care, and deprive someone else of a much-needed hospital bed. It deprives a vaccinated individual who developed an acute illness such as acute appendicitis of the chance for treatment."

He added: "If we say no to vaccines, we must seriously remember the potential hurt we can cause others, especially when healthcare resources are now limited."

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Retiree Teo Ng, 93, receiving her second dose of a Covid-19 vaccine at Toa Payoh West Community Club in August. Experts are urging seniors who have not been vaccinated against Covid-19 to get inoculated as soon as possible, as they face a higher risk of severe illness should they get infected. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI