The Straits Times
Saturday 12th June 2021
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HSA nod for second breathalyser that detects Covid-19

Clara Chong

A breath test that can accurately detect Covid-19 in two minutes received provisional authorisation from Singapore's Health Sciences Authority (HSA) on May 27, the authority said on its website yesterday.

This is the second such system to receive the HSA's provisional authorisation.

Developed by local medical technology firm Silver Factory Technology, the TracieX breathalyser has a sensitivity of 95 per cent and a specificity of 97.8 per cent, the HSA said in an update yesterday.

Sensitivity refers to a test's ability to identify those infected as positive, while specificity refers to a test's ability to correctly identify those not infected as negative.

Silver Factory was founded in January last year as a spin-off from the Nanyang Technological University. Its test analyses the human breath composition using a technique known as Raman spectroscopy.

These fast tests will facilitate safe travel arrangements and screenings at large-scale events.

These breathalysers will cost around US$20 (S$27) each.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) and Changi Airport Group (CAG) said yesterday that some airport workers have begun using disposable TracieX breathalysers to test for Covid-19 as part of a small-scale pilot.

This new, non-invasive test will gradually be scaled up to replace antigen rapid tests for more airport workers, CAAS and CAG said in a joint statement.

Earlier on May 17, a breath test developed by Breathonix, a spin-off from the National University of Singapore, also received HSA's approval.

Breathonix's breathalysers detect specific volatile organic compounds in human breath samples using a technique called mass spectrometry. Its tests have a sensitivity of 85.3 per cent and specificity of 97 per cent.

Breathonix has since conducted a few thousand tests for its pilot deployment at Tuas Checkpoint. Each test was completed in 40 to 60 seconds.

"Companies are required to collect relevant accuracy and safety data and monitor the real-world use of their tests. HSA also requires additional data from ongoing clinical studies to be submitted post-approval for HSA to ensure the continued safety and efficacy of these tests," the authority said.

chongcjy@sph.com.sg