



An ambulance arriving at Singapore General Hospital's accident and emergency department in May. Public hospital emergency departments have been busier in the past week and are seeing a higher number of Covid-19 patients, with more beds diverted to meet their needs, said the Health Ministry. ST PHOTO: YONG LI XUAN

## Longer wait for hospital admission as A&E departments see more cases

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Some patients requiring admission have had to wait longer for beds, with most emergency departments (EDs) at public hospitals kept busier in the past week compared with the month before, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said yesterday.

The EDs are also seeing a higher number of Covid-19 cases, with more beds diverted to meet their needs, a spokesman told The Straits Times.

"While the hospitals had been scaling back non-urgent surgery and admissions, the overall hospital capacity utilisation is getting more and more tight."

According to the latest data available from MOH's website,

the median waiting time for admission to wards from EDs was as high as 14½ hours at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital during the week beginning Sept 5.

Data for the week beginning Sept 12 is not available yet.

Hospitals like Singapore General Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) said last week that they are prioritising those who are critically ill, given the large number of patients showing up at their EDs.

At TTSH yesterday afternoon, The Straits Times saw a large tent being deployed at the carpark next to its ED.

The hospital said the carpark is partially closed so as to create more screening space as part of its Covid-19 ramped-up efforts.

Asked if the increased number of patients visiting EDs was worry-

ing, Singapore's director of medical services, Associate Professor Kenneth Mak, said yesterday that it is likely that many people who are well end up going to the hospital as they are worried and are not sure what to do.

"And a lot of people are actually very anxious," said Prof Mak, who spoke to ST on the sidelines of the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit at the Nanyang Technological University.

Minister for Health Ong Ye Kung said in a Facebook post on Sunday that while the overall intensive care unit (ICU) capacity is holding up, the Singapore healthcare system's accident and emergency (A&E) departments, as well as general wards, are "coming under pressure".

"Our hospitals and healthcare workers cannot be overburdened.

At this point, this is MOH's biggest challenge and we are doing our best to solve this," he added.

This is why younger, fully vaccinated people are being encouraged to recover at home, he wrote.

Mr Ong noted that more than 98 per cent of those infected from May 1 to last Thursday had either mild symptoms or none, and tended to remain that way until recovery.

His comments came a day after MOH said that some public hospitals had been experiencing a surge in patients who rushed to A&E departments with mild respiratory infection symptoms.

MOH also announced on Sunday that a new category of community care facilities will be set up for Covid-19 patients who are generally well but have underlying health conditions that require closer monitoring.

The move is aimed at augmenting hospital capacity so that only Covid-19 patients who need specialised medical attention or intensive care will be hospitalised.

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