

Singapore Warns New Virus Strains Infecting More Children, Shuts Schools

17/05/2021 13:28 by admin

Authorities announced that primary, secondary schools and junior colleges would shift to full home-based learning from Wednesday .

School term in Singapore ends on May 28.

Singapore: Singapore will close schools from Wednesday as authorities warned new coronavirus strains like the one first detected in India were affecting more children in the city-state.

The government has been tightening restrictions following a recent rise in local transmissions after months of near-zero cases.

At a virtual news conference late Sunday, authorities announced that primary and secondary schools as well as junior colleges would shift to full home-based learning from Wednesday until the end of the school term on May 28.

Hours before Sunday's news conference, Singapore confirmed 38 locally transmitted coronavirus cases, the highest daily count in eight months. Some of the cases involved children linked to a cluster at a tuition centre.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung, citing a conversation he had with the ministry's director of medical services Kenneth Mak, told a news conference Sunday that the B.1.617 strain "appears to affect children more".

The strain was first detected in India.

"Some of these mutations are much more virulent and they seem to attack the younger children," Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said at the news conference.

"This is an area of concern for all of us," he said, adding however that none of the children who had been infected were seriously ill.

The government is "working out the plans" to vaccinate students under the age of 16, Chan said in a Facebook post.

The financial hub joins Taiwan in shutting down schools to stem the surge in infections.

Taiwan's capital Taipei and adjacent New Taipei City announced Monday that schools would suspend classes from Tuesday until May 28.

Taiwan, which emerged relatively unscathed last year, announced a further 333 local cases Monday, bringing the total to just over 2,000.

The rise in local transmissions in Singapore will probably scupper a quarantine-free travel bubble with Hong Kong, due to begin on May 26 after an earlier failed attempt.

Singapore has limited public gatherings to two, banned restaurant dine-ins and closed gyms in an attempt to stop the surge in infections.

Authorities have also banned non-passengers from entering the airport terminal and closed an adjacent mall as around 9,000 workers undergo testing.

Singapore had to fight serious coronavirus outbreaks last year when the illness surged through crowded dormitories housing low-paid foreign workers, infecting tens of thousands.

But by global standards, its outbreak has been mild -- officials in the city of 5.7 million have reported more than 61,000 cases so far and 31 deaths.

- AFP