H1N1 FLU

A true test of S’porean unity

Now is not the time for panic, calls to name and shame

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FOR a country that prides itself on maintaining a sense of community, the response, at all levels, to reports that somebody may have unconsciously facilitated the spread of H1N1 in Singapore, reveals an unfortunate, and anti-social, underbelly.

Singaporeans remain at greater risk from seasonal influenza, dengue and other pathogens, let alone food poisoning and road traffic accidents — the latter causing about one-third of all accidental deaths in any one year.

Shall we name and shame all those involved in these, too? And what about those who suffer preventable injuries from playing rugby, riding horses or participating in other sports, none of which are transmittable, but the social costs of which are borne by all?

In truth, it is the coverage of H1N1 that has been blown out of all proportion, not in Singapore, but internationally, that could be accused of being irresponsible. And catching it now may also enhance our resilience, rather than diminishing it.

In truth, we are an inter-dependent society, not simply an aggregate of individuals. Anyone who thinks otherwise should try the risks that come from living entirely alone. The reaction to this event speaks volumes of Singapore’s real unity.

A world that’s too interconnected

THE comment on yesterday’s Voices pages, “Perhaps it is time we think of quarantining everyone who comes to Singapore from places known to be affected”, completely ignores the reality of the Singapore economy.

The tourism industry last year posted $14.8 billion in receipts, and employed probably more than a million Singaporeans at hotels, restaurants, malls, airports, tourist attractions and other related industries that are dependent on visitors from affected countries.

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Singapore has one of the highest population densities in the world, and that coupled with an economic dependency on foreigners makes it almost impossible to stop the spread of any virus, especially if it can be transmitted without a fever. Everything is in place to slow the spread of this virus, but a vaccine is the only real solution — and if the virus mutates, that, too will also become ineffective.

Sars was self-regulating because of the high mortality rate. Tourists were afraid to travel, and people stayed away from each other. If H1N1 mutates to a more deadly strain, the same thing will happen.

Why should firms question doc’s advice?

Letter from Michelle Jean Yeang

RECENT H1N1 cases have highlighted the need for Singaporeans to take the pandemic seriously, and reminded us of our responsibility to sound the alarm if feeling unwell. However, this social responsibility falls not just on individuals, but companies, too. Moreover, his company did not approve his second day of leave and insisted that he return to complete unfinished work.

They even put him on a 36-hour shift, depriving him of much-needed rest. His body was unable to take the exertion and he had to be sent home midway when the company’s medical personnel certified that he was in no condition to work.

If companies do not allow their employees to take the sick leave they require, they are putting all their other employees at risk. It is selfish and shows an utter disregard for the situation.

This is in complete contrast to what happened this week when my husband, who had been in close contact with a colleague who went to the Communicable Disease Centre on suspicion of H1N1, came down with high fever. Though I was the one that was sick, my company allowed me to take a day off as well, as a pre-emptive measure. I returned to work the next day only when it was confirmed that he was not infected, and I myself did not show any signs of being unwell.

Companies really need to do their part and stop putting more people at risk.