

New drive to Clean Up Singapore

NEA pushes for higher hygiene standards and revives 'Singapore's OK'

By LEE HUI CHIEH & AMRESH GUNASINGHAM

LIFT buttons, hand rails, door handles and other commonly touched surfaces are the next targets in the national bid to stave off Influenza A (H1N1) here.

The virus can be spread via such surfaces, if those infected touch them and leave secretions, and others then touch the surfaces and put their secretion-stained hands to their eyes, noses or mouths.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) will send advisories to building managements to recommend that they use disinfectants to clean these surfaces.

This is part of its new drive to "Clean Up Singapore", under which it will rope

in associations and agencies such as town councils to get their members to implement regular cleaning regimes.

It will clean crowded areas such as Orchard Road, Bugis, Chinatown, Geylang and Little India more often. It will bring forward the regular spring-cleaning of hawker centres and markets too.

The NEA is also reviving "Singapore's OK", a public hygiene campaign first launched during the nation's battle against Sars in 2003.

Under this campaign, markets, hawker centres, food shops and public toilets will be given a "Singapore's OK" sticker if they pass an inspection by the NEA.

The criteria for this stamp of approval are on top of the basic hygiene standards that establishments should already be fulfilling, said Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Yaacob Ibrahim yesterday. For example, for a restaurant to attain an "A" grade for hygiene under the NEA's regular system, it needs to ensure that food is prepared and stored hygienically, waste is disposed of properly, and



To get the "Singapore's OK" sticker, markets, hawker centres, food shops and public toilets must pass an inspection by the NEA. The criteria for this endorsement are on top of the basic hygiene standards that establishments should already be fulfilling, says Dr Yaacob. ST PHOTO: SHAHRIFA YAHAYA

have effective cleaning and pest control.

On top of these, an A-grade restaurant needs to supply customers with serving spoons on request, spring-clean four times a year, and keep its toilets clean to be given a "Singapore's OK" sticker.

Reviving the campaign is timely as Singapore now faces the looming threat of Influenza A (H1N1), Dr Yaacob added.

Singapore has no probable cases yet.

But the Health Ministry raised the alert level for the risk of a flu pandemic here by a notch from yellow to orange on Thursday, following the World Health Organisation's (WHO) sounding of a phase 5 alert, just one step short of a pandemic.

Singapore uses a five-colour alert system, rising from green to yellow, orange, red and the most serious, black.

Both of the NEA's new initiatives will

be rolled out over the next few weeks.

Foodcourt and coffeshop operator Kopitiam will join the campaign as it "helps remind all parties involved, especially hawkers, to be mindful of the importance of hygiene", said spokesman Ng Pei Ling.

It has already stepped up random checks on hygiene, ensured that sick staff are sent home, and distributed instructions on proper handwashing to staff.

A 31-year-old drinks stallholder in an Ang Mo Kio food centre, who wanted to be known only as Mr Lim, said: "If we put the 'Singapore's OK' logo here, it gives people more confidence to eat here, and this is important in these times after the rojak incident and swine flu."

He was referring to a recent food-poisoning incident that left two dead.

Founder of Restroom Association Jack Sim said the launch of the campaign was timely and important as no one knew when the virus would strike here.

He hoped that this time, it would result in lasting improvements unlike the last time, when people went back to their bad habits soon after Sars.

"We don't know when the disease will strike so we should always keep good hygiene habits."

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See Sport Page C22