

# A little soap goes a long way

## Bring back standards of hygiene applied during Sars

Letter from Chris Yau

LIKE many people, I am saddened by the deaths caused by the food poisoning at Geylang Serai Temporary Market. However, looking back, I can see how the mass infection could have happened.

Although the cause of the infection has yet to be ascertained, many of us know that a disease like cholera is spread when an infected person touches food or water that is in turn, touched by another.

Go to any food court or food centre, be it in the heartland or in town and you will see that utensils and trays are sometimes wet. Sometimes they are left unwiped and

no attempt is made to wash them with soap. Most cleaners only use water which will not kill bacteria or viruses.

I have also been to food courts that do not have any washing facilities. In the toilets, the soap dispensers can be empty for days. Imagine if someone suffering from mild diarrhoea is unable to find any soap to wash his hands. Now imagine him handling a wet tray or a set of wet utensils. It would be even worse if that person is a cleaner washing or collecting numerous trays and sets of utensils in the course of his working day.

It seems we have become rather lax about hygiene after the danger of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars) blew over. During that time when Sars was full blown, every toilet I used had functioning and full soap dispensers.

Now, I'm lucky if my office toilet has a piece of soap.

We can do much more to increase the awareness of proper hygiene. Food courts and centres could do well to consider buying commercial dishwashing machines that will clean trays and utensils with hot water. Workers handling trays and utensils should wear gloves. And of course all toilets must have functioning soap dispensers.

I find it surprising that Singaporeans — who are known for their love of food and who love to eat out — do not place greater emphasis on hygiene or concern with the cleanliness of their environment.

If we all make an effort, and with support from the relevant authorities, we can prevent another tragedy like the Indian rojak food poisoning from repeating itself.