

# Staying open — and prepared

Sars, HFMD have helped them respond to another crisis, say pre-schools

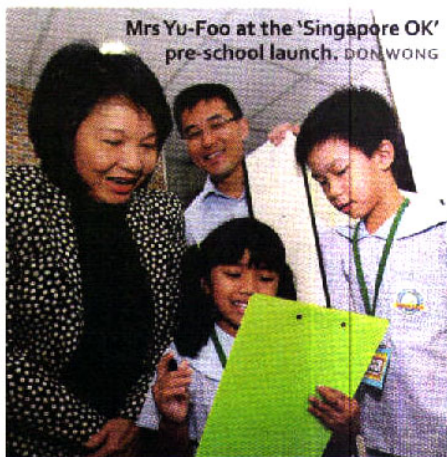
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SOME have wondered if the school holidays, which end next week, should be extended with families returning in the midst of a global H1N1 pandemic. But most pre-schools do not think the move necessary.

Measures put in place following Sars and outbreaks of hand, foot and mouth disease have made them better prepared to respond to another health crisis, they said.

Yesterday, Minister of State (Community Development, Youth and Sports) Yu-Foo Yee Shoon said that while schools won't close, the situation is being closely monitored. "We will work on the standard operating procedures with the Ministry of Health. If we suspect the disease has spread, then we should be careful and close the centres," she said, at the launch of the first batch of 27 pre-schools awarded the "Singapore OK" (SOK) status for good hygiene practices.



Mrs Yu-Foo at the 'Singapore OK' pre-school launch. DON WONG

The health authorities in Thailand and Hong Kong have opted to close some schools as a precaution amid the rising number of H1N1 infections.

In Singapore, pre-schools like LearningVision — one of the centres given the SOK seal — said they have been teaching students good toilet and personal hygiene practices. Temperatures are taken every morning. Parents are reminded to sign a travel history declaration should they travel

to affected areas like Australia and the United States, said Knowledge Universe Singapore managing director Rabiatul Adawiah Yahya. The company manages LearningVision's 22 outlets here.

"In the current outbreak, we want to give parents additional assurance that our centres are clean environments for their children," she added.

Measures taken at the People's Action Party Community Foundation (PCF) Little Wings centres are no less stringent. "If the children have just returned from an affected area, we will encourage parents to let the children start school one week later," said centre management manager Jasmine Ham.

Ultimately, the responsibility lies on parents. Mrs Yu-Foo said: "If their child is sick, don't send them to the centres."

But will every parent comply? "If my son falls sick, the right thing to do is to let him stay home; my wife and I will take time off to care for him," said Mr Sim Joo Kiang, 46.

Mr Kirwan Khamis, however, was still worried about students in his son's kindergarten who vacationed abroad. "Should the schools at least consider opening a week later, just to be on the safe side?"