

A Covid-19 lexicon

From serology to R0, the global outbreak of Covid-19 has brought technical terms into mainstream vocabulary. Cheryl Tan and Audrey Tan highlight what key terms mean.

HEALTH TERMS

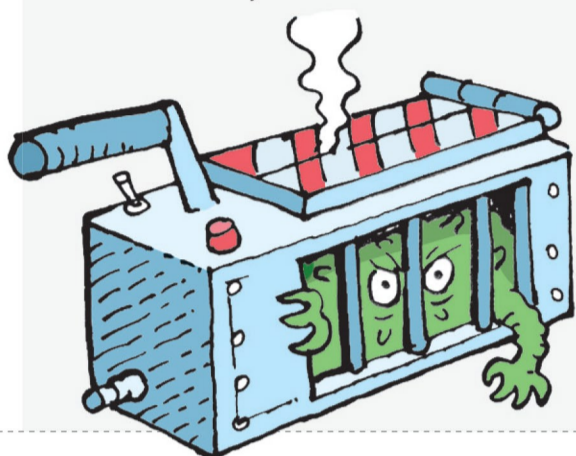


Asymptomatic

- An asymptomatic person does not show any symptoms of Covid-19, and may be an unwitting transmitter of the disease.
- Research shows that between 55 per cent and 70 per cent of coronavirus infections could be a result of asymptomatic carriers infecting others.
- National Centre for Infectious Diseases executive director Leo Yee Sin said Covid-19 manifests itself as a mild illness, but has a high viral secretion. Individuals may misjudge the seriousness of their illness and continue with routine activities.

Containment/mitigation

- **CONTAINMENT** is a pre-emptive stance taken by the Government since the early days of the outbreak, with the aim of limiting the spread of the virus through rigorous contact tracing and quarantining of suspect cases.
- **MITIGATION** measures aim to reduce the severity of the Covid-19 spread through social distancing measures such as those taken by Singapore during its current circuit breaker phase.
- World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised Singapore's "all-government approach" in battling the Covid-19 virus, adding that "it is not about containment or mitigation, which is a false dichotomy. It is about both".



Dorscon yellow/orange/red

- Dorscon refers to Singapore's Disease Outbreak Response System Condition, a colour-coded framework which reflects the current disease situation. There are four alert levels – green, yellow, orange and red, depending on the severity and spread of the disease.
- **YELLOW:** A mild infection, or a severe infection that is not spreading here, though the community needs to be careful. This is a step up from green, which indicates minor problems.
- **ORANGE:** On Feb 6, Singapore raised the Dorscon level to orange, which means that the disease is severe with transmission, but it is generally contained and has moderate to high public health impact. This is Singapore's current status.
- **RED:** The disease is severe and spreading widely.



False negatives/false positives

- **FALSE NEGATIVES** are people who are carriers of the virus but have been tested negative for it, due to tests that are not 100 per cent reliable.
- As the tests are conducted through nasal swabs, they may come back negative as the virus might have shifted from the upper respiratory system (where the back of the nose meets the throat) to the lower respiratory system (where the lungs are).
- Recovering Covid-19 patients must receive two negative test results in a row before they can be discharged.
- In South Korea, some patients who recovered from the coronavirus have tested positive again, with experts citing reasons such as faulty tests and the possibility that the virus has been "reactivated".



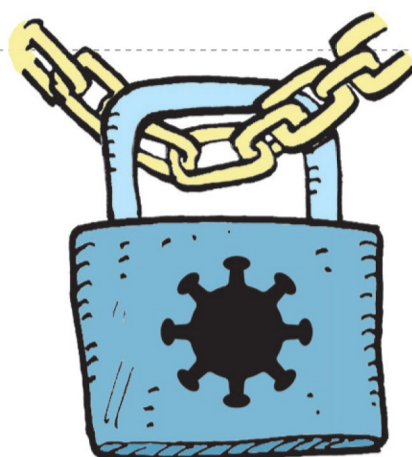
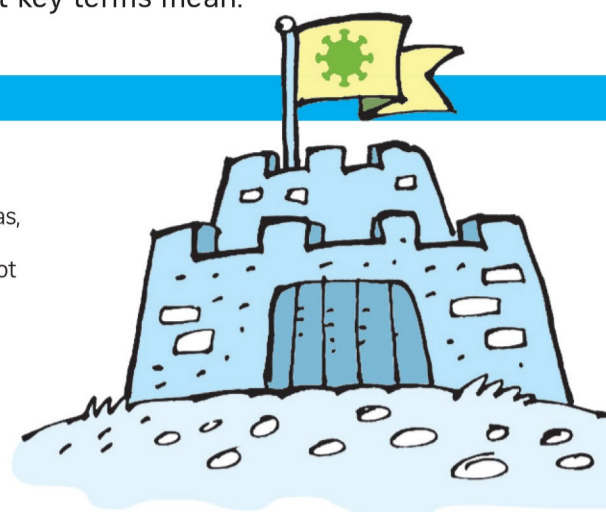
- **FALSE POSITIVES** are people who test positive for a particular disease without actually having it.

- In March, two Covid-19 patients who tested positive for dengue were found later to not have the mosquito-borne disease.
- A paper published in The Lancet medical journal on March 4 cautioned doctors not to disregard the possibility of Covid-19 due to a positive dengue rapid test result, as failing to do so could have implications on both the patient and public health.



Isolation areas

- Several dormitories have been gazetted as isolation areas, due to the large number of Covid-19 cases.
- All foreign workers staying in these isolation areas will not be allowed to work or move between blocks, to limit interaction with other residents.
- Meals are provided to them, and communal toilets will have scheduled staggered shower times.
- Employers will still be required to pay the workers their salaries as the workers are considered to be on hospitalisation leave.

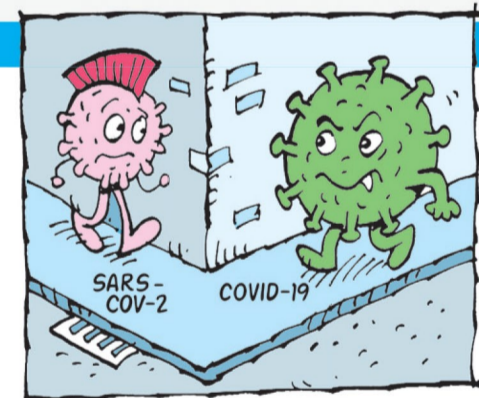
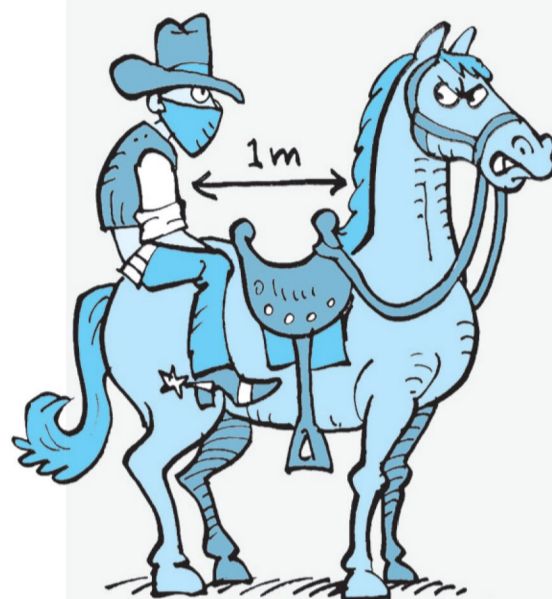


Lockdown

- On Jan 23, the first epicentre of the outbreak in Wuhan, China, went into lockdown, where all public transport services, including buses, railways, flights and ferries, were shut down. Residents were barred from leaving without permission from the authorities.
- These strict quarantine measures worked, with cases slowing to a trickle. On April 8, Wuhan reopened its borders, with major transport links reinstated.
- In Singapore, the Government has refrained from a complete lockdown. Instead, it has gone into a circuit breaker mode to curb local transmissions by shutting down most workplaces and schools.
- All short-term visitors have also been barred from entering or transiting through Singapore, with further curbs on work-pass holders entering Singapore.

Social distancing

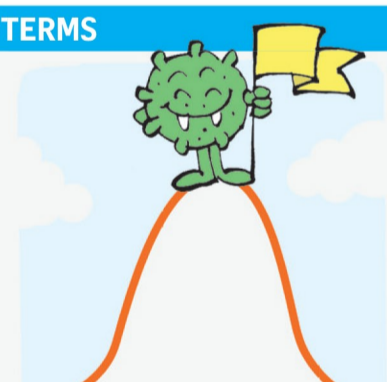
- Social distancing measures aim to minimise inter-household interaction to reduce risks of seeding new local clusters.
- Those who refuse to comply will face at least a \$300 fine, while repeat offenders will face higher fines or prosecution in court for egregious cases.



Sars-CoV-2/Covid-19

- **Sars-CoV-2** is the name of the coronavirus that causes the respiratory disease. It stands for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, as it is from the same family of coronaviruses that caused the severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) outbreak in 2003.
- The disease itself is known as **Covid-19**. "Co" stands for "corona", "vi" for "virus" and "d" for "disease", while "19" is for the year, as the outbreak was first identified on Dec 31, 2019.
- The WHO announced the official names for the virus and the disease on Feb 11.

SCIENTIFIC TERMS



Epidemic curve

- The epidemic curve is an n-shaped curve that is used to visualise when new cases happen and at what speed during a virus outbreak.
- Flattening the curve is a key goal of public health officials.
- It means avoiding a huge peak in Covid-19 cases (a curve with a steep incline spread over a shorter period of time) in favour of a slower growth that becomes a moderate plateau (a curve with a gentler incline, spread out over a longer time period).
- If the same number of cases is spread over a longer time period, health systems stand a better chance of being able to cope, experts say.

R0

(pronounced R-naught)

- R0 is the basic reproduction number of a disease. It provides healthcare officials with a gauge for the average number of people who will catch the disease from a single infected person.
- Globally, the R0 for Covid-19 is estimated to be between two and three. This means that on average, every Covid-19 patient will go on to infect about two to three other people.
- But this number depends on many factors, including social factors, such as the number of people an infected person is exposed to.
- Associate Professor Kenneth Mak, the Health Ministry's director of medical services, said at a press conference on April 14 that prior to the outbreak in dormitories in Singapore, Singapore's R0 was "well below one". Calculations are ongoing to determine the R0 following the outbreak at the dormitories.



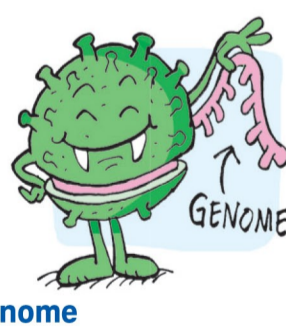
Therapeutics

- This refers to the branch of medicine that looks at treatment methods to alleviate or prevent a particular disease.
- Examples include antiviral drugs, monoclonal antibody therapy and vaccines.



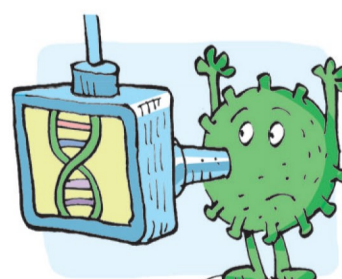
Genome

- A virus' unique genome serves as a "fingerprint" to distinguish it from other viruses.
- The genome of Sars-CoV-2 – the virus which causes Covid-19 – comprises a single strand of genetic material called RNA, which is made up of an "alphabet" of molecules known as nucleotides.
- The way in which these four nucleotide bases are arranged is unique to the specific virus, similar to how human fingerprints can help to differentiate one person from another.



Antibodies

- An important element of the immune system. Antibodies, which are found in the blood, detect the presence of a virus and latch on to the infected cell, flagging it so other elements of the immune system can kick in to destroy it.



Polymerase chain reaction

- This refers to a molecular biology process which can help to determine if a sample contains any detectable genetic material of the coronavirus.

FUNNY TERMS

Covidiot

- A person who ignores social distancing rules.
- A person who hoards groceries.



Moronavirus

- What a covidiot is infected with.



Coffee

- A person who coughs without a mask.



Quarantini

- A slang term for a cocktail people drink at home while under quarantine during – and because of – the coronavirus pandemic.

