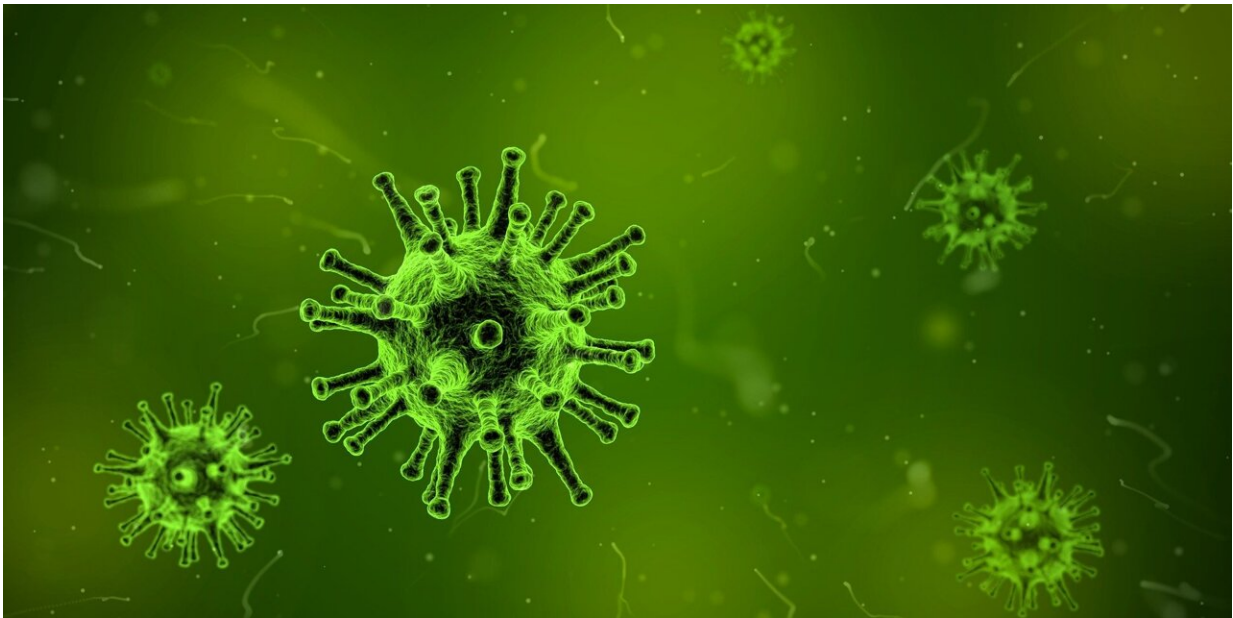# Singapore says healthcare system risks being 'overwhelmed' as virus surges

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Singapore's healthcare system is at risk of being "overwhelmed" by surging coronavirus infections, government officials warned Wednesday, a day after the city-state expanded quarantine-free travel as it shifts its approach to dealing with the pandemic.

The health ministry reported 18 deaths on Wednesday—Singapore's highest toll in a single day—and 3,862 more cases, just shy of the record

3,994 tallied the day before.

"At the current situation, we face considerable risk of the healthcare system being overwhelmed," Lawrence Wong, co-chair of a government task force fighting COVID-19, said before the new figures were released.

Wong, who is also the finance minister, said nearly 90 percent of isolation beds in hospitals have been filled and more than two-thirds of intensive care unit beds are occupied.

His comments come a day after the city-state expanded its quarantine-free travel to fully vaccinated passengers from eight countries, including key trading partners the United States, Britain and France.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said the global business hub cannot remain closed indefinitely, and the city-state has shifted from a zero-tolerance strategy with lockdowns and closed borders to taking the approach of living with COVID-19.

Analysts said the travel lane scheme, which started with Brunei and Germany last month, could provide a shot in the arm for the pandemic-hammered airline and tourism industries. But it nevertheless stirred fears among some ordinary Singaporeans as the city grapples with its latest outbreak.

Most of Singapore's cases are mild or asymptomatic with patients recovering at home, allowing hospitals to focus on seriously sick COVID patients.

"We are trying to add capacity, but it's not simply a matter of having extra beds or purchasing new equipment because... our medical personnel are stretched and fatigued," Wong said.

"And while we are trying to reinforce the team, it will take time for these reinforcements to come in."

Taskforce co-leader and Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said the number of infections among unvaccinated people aged 60 years and above "continues to be high", accounting for two-thirds of patients in the ICU and those who have died.

Singapore has reported more than 158,000 coronavirus cases and 264 deaths.

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