

About 25,000 close contacts of COVID-19 cases identified using TraceTogether: Gan Kim Yong



TraceTogether tokens are seen before being distributed to residents at Jalan Besar Community Club in Singapore, Sep 14, 2020. (Photo: Reuters/Edgar Su)



By Ian Cheng

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SINGAPORE: About 25,000 close contacts of COVID-19 cases have been identified through TraceTogether to date, said Health Minister Gan Kim Yong on Monday (Nov 2).

Of the close contacts identified, 160 eventually tested positive for the coronavirus.

"It has enabled the early identification and isolation of cases, faster than would have been possible with manual tracing," said Mr Gan in a written parliamentary reply.

He was responding to a question by Member of Parliament Yip Hon Weng on how many positive cases have been successfully tracked from the use of TraceTogether tokens, how the Government tracks the utilisation rate of the tokens and whether there are plans to integrate them with the SafeEntry feature.

The TraceTogether programme relies on proximity data to provide an initial list of close contacts of COVID-19 cases.

Authorities announced last month that TraceTogether-only SafeEntry will be progressively implemented at popular venues across Singapore by the end of the year.

As of Nov 1, 570,000 residents have collected their tokens, said Mr Gan.

About 2.7 million people have downloaded the TraceTogether app, which serves the same function as the token.

"The effectiveness of TraceTogether increases as more users come on board. We therefore encourage more Singaporeans to join the TraceTogether programme either by downloading the app or collecting and wearing the token," said Mr Gan.

"We have also introduced TraceTogether-only SafeEntry for selected higher-risk settings, and will extend this to more venues such as malls, F&B outlets and workplaces towards the end of December."

He noted that the Government has also started to integrate SafeEntry features into TraceTogether tokens - the QR code on the back of the tokens may be used for SafeEntry check-ins, or scanned for entry into a venue.

"We will continue to study deeper integration of the two systems, in order to minimise public inconvenience even as we shore up our digital tracing capability so as to open up our economy and resume activities safely," said Mr Gan.

GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE ENHANCING CONTACT TRACING SYSTEMS

The Government will continue to invest in enhancing contact tracing systems, such as by improving the convenience of SafeEntry check-ins, said Mr Gan, adding that authorities will work to acquire more tokens for residents.

He was responding to questions from Workers' Party MP He Ting Ru who asked how much has been spent on the SafeEntry system, the TraceTogether app and tokens, including their production and distribution.

As of September, S\$2.4 million has been spent on developing the TraceTogether app, said Mr Gan.

Additionally, S\$5.2 million has been spent for SafeEntry; and S\$6.2 million for the development and procurement of TraceTogether tokens.

Beyond what the Government has already spent, it will continue investing in enhancing SafeEntry and TraceTogether, said Mr Gan.

On whether the Ministry of Health sees further developmental costs associated with such contact tracing systems, Mr Gan said: "The actual amount spent will depend on several factors, including the actual number of residents who need a token."

Source: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/tracetgether-app-tokens-close-contacts-cases-identified-covid19-13442296>

