

Woman, 58, is missing link between two church clusters

New medical test shows she passed virus infection to Grace Assembly of God cluster during CNY gathering

✔ TATIANA MOHAMAD ROSLI

When two churches became clusters of the coronavirus infection, one common question was whether there was a link between them.

The answer, thanks to an innovative test, is yes.

Developed by researchers from Duke-NUS Medical School, the serological test uses a blood sample to detect past infections in fully recovered patients by looking for specific anti-bodies that remain in the body for several years.

Using this test, contact tracers from the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the police were able to identify a 58-year-old Singaporean woman and a Chinese New Year gathering in Mei Hwan Drive as the missing links between the Life Church and Missions cluster and the Grace Assembly of God church cluster.

MOH said at a press conference yesterday that the woman, known as Case 91, and her 54-year-old husband, Case 83, were at the Life Church on Jan 19, as were Cases 8 and 9, two Chinese nationals from Wuhan who tested positive for the virus late last month.

Though Cases 91 and 83 were



Contact tracers found that Case 91 had infected Case 66, a 28-year-old male who works at Grace Assembly of God church, at a Jan 25 gathering. TNP FILE PHOTO

asymptomatic and well at the time of investigations, MOH's records showed Case 91 had reported onset of symptoms on Jan 23 and sought treatment at Sengkang General Hospital on Jan 26.

But she was not diagnosed with Covid-19 as her symptoms were mild.

Her husband was also unwell in late January and sought treatment repeatedly at a general practitioner clinic.

Both of them were referred to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases for tests on Feb 18. Case 83 was warded at the

centre after testing positive for Covid-19 on Feb 19.

As his wife had recovered from the virus and was well, she took the serological test and also tested positive for Covid-19 on Saturday.

From there, the contact tracers closed in on the missing links between the two church clusters.

They discovered the couple had attended a Chinese New Year gathering at Mei Hwan Drive on Jan 25, two days after Case 91 had symptoms.

While they were there, she infected Case 66 and eight

other people.

Case 66, a 28-year-old male Singaporean who works at Grace Assembly of God church, reported onset of symptoms on Jan 29 and subsequently infected his colleagues, said MOH.

The Grace cluster is currently Singapore's largest with 23 confirmed cases.

Stressing the importance of being socially responsible when one is unwell, MOH director of medical services Kenneth Mak said: "You should stay home and not engage in social interactions or going out because the risk of spread remains."

Citing the importance of finding the missing link between the two clusters, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said: "If we're not able to determine the source, there's a risk that it's still in the community and we may have other clusters as a result of it."

"Now that we're able to determine the source came from the Life Church cluster... there's a greater assurance that these two clusters are within our control."

tatianar@sph.com.sg