

Experts: Total cases could hit 40,000 this month

The total number of coronavirus cases here could hit 30,000 or 40,000 this month, but containment measures will keep the situation under control, experts said.

Associate Professor Alex Cook, vice-dean of research at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, noted that while the total case counts have continued to rise, the numbers have recently started to stabilise.

From the first coronavirus case on Jan 23, Singapore took about 13 weeks to cross the 10,000 mark on April 22. This figure doubled in the last two weeks to hit just over 20,000 on Wednesday, with foreign workers in dormitories accounting for the bulk of the cases.

But the number of new cases reported each day has remained

below 1,000 for the past 13 days and has trended down since a high of 1,426 cases on April 20.

Prof Cook said recent figures demonstrate a growing divergence between epidemiological models and actual cases. "The models say the epidemic should be growing ever higher but the data is instead stabilising... It still seems possible that we'll hit 30,000 or 40,000 infections this month, but perversely that would be a success compared to an unmitigated epidemic growth scenario."

Dr Leong Hoe Nam, an infectious diseases expert at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, agreed that cases could cross 40,000 this month but said it is likely that Singapore has gone past the peak of daily confirmed cases.

"The number of 500 to 800

which we see every day represents the cases that were infected earlier," he said.

Professor Paul Tambyah from NUS' Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine said cases both inside and outside the dormitories can be controlled by identification and isolation, contact tracing and quarantine. "With that in place, there is a good chance that (daily community cases) will go down to zero like they did in February. In fact, the same approach on a much larger scale is also likely to work in the dorms," he said.

A further easing of circuit breaker measures will begin on Tuesday, such as allowing barbers and hairdressers to reopen. This is unlikely to have a major impact on case figures, said Prof Tambyah.

The Straits Times