

Public health or the economy? That's a false choice, says WHO chief

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The head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has debunked arguments that countries have to choose between public health and the economy when they look at whether to ease restrictions following a lockdown.

“That is a false choice,” said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Instead, the WHO urges countries to focus on four essential priorities:

- Prevent Covid-19 amplifying events. Around the world, explosive outbreaks have been linked to gatherings in places like stadiums, nightclubs and places of worship.
- Protect the vulnerable to save lives and reduce the burden on health systems in terms of severely and critically ill patients.
- Educate and empower communities to protect themselves and others. Physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and masks can help curb transmission and save lives. Not when done in isolation, but by practising all the measures together.
- Persist with the public health basics. Find, isolate, test and care for people who have been infected, and trace and quarantine their contacts.

Dr Tedros said there are many countries that have “effectively prevented or controlled their outbreaks by doing these four things and doing them well”, and named Singapore and New Zealand as two such places.

He was speaking at NUS Medicine's



WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was speaking at NUS Medicine's final Covid-19 webinar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

final Covid-19 webinar yesterday, which looked at global solidarity. The session featured 16 speakers both local and foreign.

Dr Tedros said the pandemic has changed the world.

“Lives and livelihoods have been lost, and economies and societies have been upended,” he said. “The pandemic has exposed and exploited political fault lines and inequalities and the gaps in national health systems.”

But on a more positive note, he said for everything Covid-19 has taken from us, it has also given us something – a reminder of what really matters and the opportunity to forge a common future.

The real question is whether countries can come together in solidarity to share the fruits of research when a viable vaccine is available.

Dr Tedros said: “The virus thrives on division. But united, we can defeat it. The pandemic has reminded us of a simple truth – that for all our differences, we are one human race and we are stronger together.”

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