

**TRANSCRIPT OF MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING'S REMARKS  
AT THE 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-NCOV) PRESS CONFERENCE  
ON THURSDAY, 30 JANUARY 2020, 12PM AT NATIONAL PRESS CENTRE**

1. I understand many Singaporeans are concerned whether we have sufficient masks in our stockpile. Let me explain how we manage the stockpile. It depends on three factors. First, how much we have in our physical stockpile. Second, what is our usage rate, meaning how fast we use up the stockpile. Third, our resupply quantum and frequency. These three factors determine whether we have sufficient stockpile, not just for now, but over the longer term.

2. We will have enough if we manage these three factors appropriately, use our masks appropriately and if we can secure resupply. So far, as shared, the usage rate in the last one week has been much higher than what would be reasonably expected. But we understand that when people are fearful, there is a tendency to panic buy or hoard. But this is not very useful to the entire system. So if we do not manage the private usage rate and prioritise the allocation, we will deprive our essential services, especially the healthcare services, of the masks, and this will in turn jeopardise our entire healthcare system, not allowing us to take care of those who need it the most.

3. The other thing that we must realise is that today, we are in a situation where there is a global contingency and how long this contingency will last is still unknown at this point. So we must make sure that our supply lines remain robust. We also cannot assume that our supply lines are not unconstrained or unaffected by the competition from others who are taking action to secure their own supply lines. So, for example, in the last few days, you would have heard that many producers around the world are prioritising China because it is the epicentre of the current situation. For example, Taiwan has already banned the export of surgical masks. We also have other healthcare needs in other parts of the world. For example, the Australian bushfire and the situation in the Philippines. So it is important for us to understand that while we manage our stockpile, we must also manage our usage rate to prioritise those who need it the most, such as the healthcare workers and the vulnerable, and at the same time, we must be cognisant of the challenges that we may face with our resupply lines that come from around the world.

4. Hence, we must judiciously and collectively manage our usage, give priority to those who need it, such as the public health agencies, the workers at the frontline and the vulnerable in our society. Second, manage our personal usage appropriately. Only use it when we are going to see the doctor because we are unwell. And prepare for the long haul but never, never succumb to the short-term fears and panic buying and hoarding behaviours, because these will destroy the entire system that we have.

5. So I can understand the fears and concerns of many Singaporeans and I appreciate that many Singaporeans, the vast majority of Singaporeans, are staying calm and they are helping us to manage this for the long haul. However, we also know that there are some in the local community that have taken to hoarding the supplies and I can understand that such behaviour might not be uncommon in many parts of the world where there is an outbreak of an epidemic.

6. But I must emphasize that such behaviour is not appropriate and not helpful for our collective defence. We must do this collectively. Collective defence is our strongest defence. We must all act in unison, act together, and not jeopardise the entire system by doing things that we think might benefit ourselves, protect ourselves but to the detriment of all else and everyone else in the society.

7. So what are we going to do? We will make sure that every Singaporean who requires a mask to access medical health will be able to have access to this. So since yesterday, we have activated the plan, we have asked the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), the People's Association (PA) and relevant agencies to commence the packing of masks for household distribution. Since yesterday, they have commenced planning and this afternoon, they will commence the physical packing. Over the next 1 to 2 days, they will progressively push the packets to the community. The PA and grassroots network will take over the supplies, the packets from the SAF and commence distribution to the Singapore households. The exercise to distribute the masks to the households will commence this Saturday at 2pm in every constituency. But we seek Singaporeans' understanding that this exercise to distribute to about 1.3 million households will take us 4 to 5 days. We will keep everyone informed in batches, to go to their community centres or residents' committees to collect the masks.

8. There is no need to rush because we will have enough for all the 1.3 million households in Singapore. Whether it is HDB residents, or private estate residents, PA will progressively inform the people of the time to go and collect. If they miss the time to go and collect, they can always come at a later time when it is convenient for them. We will go zone by zone, so that everybody will have their turn and need not rush. The PA will also mobilise its volunteers to help distribute to those households which may be physically impaired and unable to come and collect at the CCs or RCs. At this point in time, I must also say that for those households which already have masks and do not need it, there is no need for them to go and rush to collect.

9. In each of the packets that the PA will distribute, each packet will contain 4 masks and a set of instructions for these masks to be used when someone in the family may need to seek medical help. This is not a set of masks for us to take, open immediately, use it to go to the hawker centre. These masks are to be kept in the household for members of the family who might get ill and need to access medical help. Upon medical assistance, the subsequent need for more masks will be assessed and be provided for. The masks are not for wearing immediately, but rather, for people who have fallen sick, who are going to seek medical help and after that, if the person needs medical supplies, the doctors, medical institutions will follow up and provide them with the necessary supplies. In this way, we hope that we will be able to manage the stockpile, the usage rate by giving Singaporeans the assurance, the peace of mind that all of us, every family, will have access to the masks when we need it.

10. On the other hand, for the resupplies, notwithstanding the global challenges where many countries are reprioritising their supply chains, we are continuing to work closely with our partners to identify new suppliers and we have some other new leads with new countries. Those are work-in-progress, and we are also making sure that our existing contracts and existing supply lines are kept robust, because there is now a global contest, in some way, to secure the supplies for the respective countries. So our priority of resupply will be to all the public health institutions, rather than the private retailers. Our priority is to make sure our healthcare system remains robust, our families and households have access to it, and everybody in Singapore, Singaporeans can be assured that every household will have access to this. So there is no need to rush to the retailers or to the CC, this will be done systematically.

11. As many of you know, there are reports of masks being resold at much higher prices. It is wrong for the resellers to try to take advantage of this situation to profiteer. We will not allow this to happen. I know that some platforms like Carousell, Qoo10 have threatened to suspend such profiteers. I applaud their actions. These are responsible

platforms that can help us to police such profiteering activities. Today, the Price Controller will also issue letters to retailers and e-commerce platforms. We will also issue warning letters to retailers such as Deen Express, who are suspected of profiteering. They will give us an answer to what they are doing and why they are doing what they are doing. Notification letters to e-commerce platforms to cooperate with MTI and provide us with the requested information on errant sellers on their platforms will be executed today. We want to reassure Singaporeans that we do not stand for such behaviour in Singapore. We also urge Singaporeans not to support or give in to such profiteers, because we do have our means to provide the necessary supplies to Singaporeans. If we do this systematically, calmly, pace ourselves, we will be able to manage our stockpile, manage the usage rate and the uncertainties.

12. We will do everything that we can to take care of all Singaporeans. Most importantly, we also urge all Singaporeans to stay calm, stay healthy, take care of one another and not just our own individual needs. Every household will have access to a set of masks to address the concerns of difficulties in purchasing them, and this will hopefully allow our supply lines to return to normalcy. I am confident that the majority of Singaporeans are calm and can understand why we need to prioritise the essential medical services, those working at the frontline, those vulnerable, this has been the way that we take care of each other, this is the way that we will take care of each other and this will be the way that we take care of each other. That whatever resources that we have, we will prioritise them carefully, use them carefully, so that we can last the journey. On our part, we will also take to task errant retailers who try to exploit the vulnerabilities of Singaporeans.