

2985 Jalan Bukit Merah
#02-2C,
SMF Building
Singapore 159457



Singapore
Medical
Association

Website: www.sma.org.sg
Email: sma@sma.org.sg
UEN No.: S61SS0168E
Tel: 6223 1264 Fax: 6252 9693

10 April 2020

Mr Gan Kim Yong
Mr Lawrence Wong

Co-chairs
Multi-Ministry Taskforce on COVID-19

Dear Ministers,

Re: Child care arrangements for healthcare workers

We would like to thank you for leading the Taskforce in coordinating the national efforts against COVID-19. We strongly support the Circuit Breaker measures the Taskforce have implemented and acknowledge the offer made to essential workers that childcare arrangements will be made available for us in this challenging period.

However, we would like to bring to your attention that the recent measures to close schools and pre-schools and to disallow children from being dropped off at their grandparents' have brought significant difficulties to healthcare workers. Healthcare workers cannot work from home like the rest of the population. We are not able to supervise our children in home-based learning. In addition, many of us have to work night shifts.

From this week, many healthcare workers have been unable to send their children to childcare centres and pre-schools as many have domestic helpers and therefore do not qualify for child care service. We cannot expect one domestic helper to take care of several children and still supervise them for home-based learning. The education of healthcare workers' children should not be compromised. Some have enlisted the help of grandparents and other senior family members to help with child care in the day. Following the Taskforce's announcement yesterday that children cannot be dropped off at their grandparents', it has become even more difficult for healthcare workers to arrange for childcare. We have received feedback that many healthcare workers are considering taking leave from work to take care of their children.

For healthcare workers to concentrate on the fight against COVID-19, and to prevent attrition of precious healthcare manpower from the workforce at this critical juncture, we ask that the Taskforce address the concerns of healthcare and other essential workers on the daycare arrangements for our children.

We propose the following arrangements for the Taskforce's consideration:

1. Childcare centres and pre-schools to maintain a basic level of daycare service for children of essential workers who cannot work from home, regardless of the number of such children in the centre. Having domestic workers at home should not be a disqualifying criterion for this arrangement.
2. Arrange for the provision of 24-hour childcare services for essential workers who require this service.

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3. Allow the children of healthcare workers to be taken care of by grandparents not in the same domicile, with the following caveats to prevent infection to senior citizens:

- i. Children who exhibit symptoms of respiratory infections or fever should not be sent to grandparents
- ii. Grandparents should be advised to wear masks when in close contact with the children
- iii. Healthcare workers should minimise contact with grandparents during drop-off and pick-up.

The 3 measures above will greatly relieve healthcare and other essential workers of the anxiety and worry for our children's care arrangements and allow us to focus fully on the task at hand.

Your kind consideration and timely intervention will be greatly appreciated by my fellow healthcare workers.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Yik Voon', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Lee Yik Voon
President
Singapore Medical Association