

Social norms valued in 2018 remain important today: Expert

Cheryl Tan

Removing stagnant water to prevent mosquitoes from breeding is regarded as the most desired social norm by Singaporeans, followed by refraining from spitting or littering.

A survey of 3,000 Singaporeans, carried out from August to December 2018, found 73 per cent rated stagnant water removal as a very important social norm, followed by 72.6 per cent for not spitting or littering in public.

The results of the survey were released last Friday by Associate Professor Leong Chan-Hoong, who is now with the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth as part of SG Cares, a movement that aspires to build a more caring society in Singapore.

Prof Leong said the results, which took some time to analyse, remain relevant amid the Covid-19 pandemic and the resurgence in dengue, both of which highlight the importance of health and hygiene.

“People are still as cognisant that these civic norms are important, but I would expect more individuals to take active steps to encourage those around them to do the same, especially when the importance of such socially responsible behaviour comes to the forefront,” he said.

For instance, desirable norms such as refraining from spitting in public now bear much greater weight, as failing to do so could pose a health hazard to others. This is especially so because the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 spreads through respiratory droplets.

Not surprisingly, removing stagnant water to prevent mosquito breeding was rated as the most desirable social norm because there was a sharp rise in dengue in 2018, with 3,285 cases reported.

As the number of dengue infections surges past 10,000 this year, Prof Leong noted that the concerns then were just as valid today.

He hoped that this would lead to more civic-minded behaviour among individuals, such as people taking active steps to remove stag-

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR

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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LEONG CHAN-HOONG, on how the 2018 survey results remain relevant today.

nant water in common corridors and their neighbourhoods.

Other norms that were rated as very important in the survey included giving up seats on public transport (62.1 per cent), keeping common areas clean (53.3 per cent) and getting along well with neighbours (48.7 per cent).



In the 2018 survey of 3,000 Singaporeans, 28.2 per cent rated the clearing of one's own plates in hawker centres as very important. With dining-in at eateries set to be allowed during phase two of the post-circuit breaker reopening, Professor Leong Chan-Hoong suggested that more thought should be given to this social norm. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

However, only 29.7 per cent rated smiling and greeting others as very important, and 28.2 per cent rated the clearing of one's own plates in hawker centres as very important.

Prof Leong suggested that more thought should be given to this as dining-in at eateries will soon be permitted as Singapore moves towards

phase two of its reopening after the circuit breaker period.

“There are two factors at play here. There's the health dimension of keeping public areas clean and hygienic, but also the dimension of civic consciousness, such as cleaning up after yourself to lessen the load on cleaners, where the underly-

ing driver of empathy may not be as salient,” he said.

“This is a good habit that may require greater awareness, and more targeted messaging could be promoted to induce more socially desirable behaviour among the public.”

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