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No jab, no free care: Singapore warns unvaccinated they must pay their own Covid medical bills

The new rules come into force from next month as the tiny Asian country struggles to beat its worst outbreak of the pandemic

By Nicola Smith, ASIA CORRESPONDENT

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Singapore has warned its citizens they will have to pay for their own medical bills if they contract Covid-19 after refusing to get vaccinated without a valid reason.

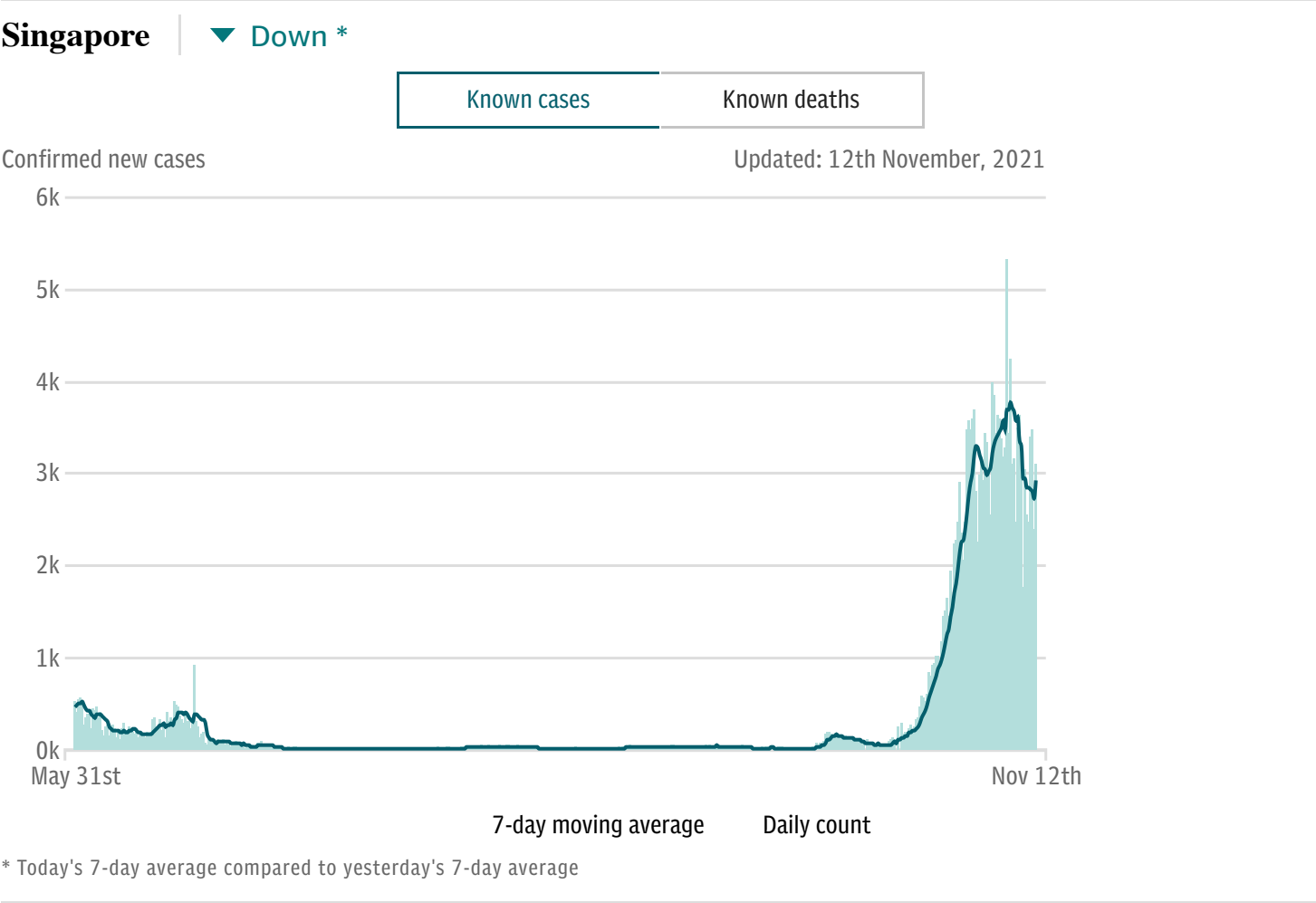
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/no-jab-no-free-care-singapore-warns-unvaccinated-must-pay-covid/>

The new rules, which will be enforced from December, are coming in as the tiny Asian country struggles to beat its worst outbreak of the pandemic, reporting 2,000-3,000 cases a day.

In June, the government of the city state of 5.7 million, announced [a new roadmap to resume normal life](#) by treating Covid-19 like any other endemic disease, [including plans to stop counting daily cases](#) and slowly reopen to allow quarantine-free travel and large gatherings.

But by September, the new strategy was already being put to the test as cases soared among the unvaccinated, putting the healthcare system under strain. Ong Ye Kung, the health minister, [called the wave of cases a “rite of passage”](#) as the country made the difficult transition.

Singapore has one of the world's highest vaccination rates, with 85 per cent of its population fully inoculated, and public health experts have pointed out that the vast majority of daily cases are mild or asymptomatic.



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But the decision to deny free treatment to the unvaccinated, in a major departure from previous healthcare policy, suggests frustration within the government circles that pockets of vaccine hesitancy are hampering the country’s exit from the pandemic.

“Unvaccinated persons make up a sizeable majority of those who require intensive inpatient

care, and disproportionately contribute to the strain on our healthcare resources,” the health ministry said in a statement.

Bills for those who are ineligible for vaccination – such as children under 12 or those with certain medical conditions – will still be fully paid.

The pandemic’s toll on Singapore has been mild in comparison to much of the world. Just over 500 people have died from Covid-19 since January 2020, with most deaths occurring during the latest wave and especially among older citizens.

However, analysts believe Singapore will stay the course of its blueprint to reopen, even if it slows down the pace. A recently launched booster campaign has already seen 18 per cent of the population take a third shot.

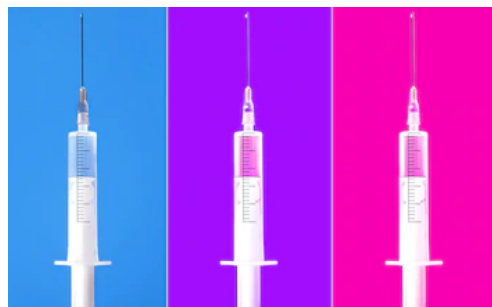
In September, Prof Paul Tambyah, president of the Asia Pacific Society of Clinical Microbiology told *The Telegraph* that the main reason for rocketing cases was that the vaccines do not prevent transmission and their protection against infection wanes over time.

“The main lesson is that we need newer and better vaccines. The good news is that there are many in the pipeline including newer versions of both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines which are most widely used in Singapore,” he said.

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