Research don says cases would have soared without measures to slow down the spread

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If Singapore had not initiated measures such as contact tracing and quarantine, more than 1,000 people would have been infected with Covid-19 by now, instead of 32, according to Prof Cook.

The outbreak would have hit peak by late April, after which the number of infections here would start going down, said associate professor Alexander Cook, vice dean for research at the National University of Singapore.

But Prof Cook explained that for Covid-19 to reach that scale, where there is no vaccine available means that half the population - or about 2.5 million people - would have been infected.

Covid-19 is more transmissible than influenza, he said. In the case of the flu, one infected person generally passes it to 1 to 3 other people, according to estimates based on the transmission of previous strains of influenza.

But Prof Cook said Singapore has been able to put a lot of effort into contact tracing.

This, together with other measures such as border checks, has reduced the transmission rate of the disease from the global average of one person spreading it to two to 2.5 other people, to a patient spreading disease to just one other person, he said.

Every day, in quarantining someone who is infected, it is possible to cut the number of cases by 0.3 to 0.4 per day, said Prof Cook.

"It is not much, but it all adds up. If your transmission rate is just above one, you will still get quite a few signatures.

"This is why Singapore tries to identify all close contacts of an infected person within 24 hours. Prof Cook said contact tracing to contain a disease is possible with 20 to 25 new cases a day, but added: "You won’t be able to do the same level of contact tracing if you have 1,000 cases a day.

"Even at that point, you still have contact tracing and quarantining can reduce the viral numbers. If you stop our measures, it will go on to the trajectories of other countries. It is going to grow, so we are going to stop this," he said. "It is really dependent on both the Government and the population socially responsible.

"This means people observing precautions and the Government continuing with its measures such as contact tracing. "It is a lot of work," Prof Cook said. "If you do not take that, it is a disaster. Even if you are missing a lot, contact tracing will still bring down the number of cases.""