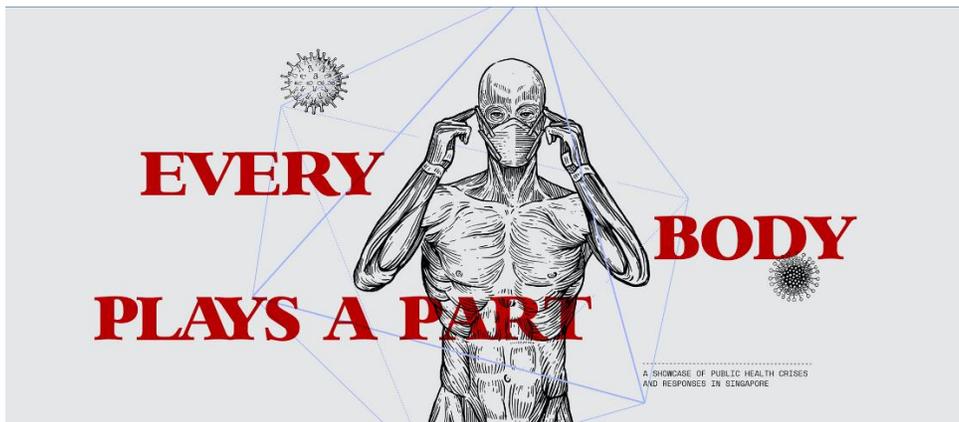


For immediate dissemination

## National Museum of Singapore presents *Every Body Plays a Part: A Showcase of Public Health Crises and Responses in Singapore*

*The digital showcase features a selection of artefacts from the museum's collection that explores the little-known side of Singapore's history of public health*



Singapore, 14 September 2020 – The National Museum of Singapore will be launching *Every Body Plays a Part: A Showcase of Public Health Crises and Responses in Singapore*. This online showcase will provide insights into Singapore's past experiences with infectious diseases and public health issues and observes how some of these measures are still undertaken to manage the COVID-19 pandemic today. The exhibition will be accessible on the National Museum's website at <https://go.gov.sg/everybodyplaysapart> from 18 September 2020.

Drawing from the National Museum's rich collection, *Every Body Plays a Part* presents 39 artefacts and one newly-commissioned photograph. The photograph and 35 of the artefacts have not been displayed in the National Museum's galleries before. The fresh narrative highlights the measures taken to stem the spread of contagious diseases on the island, the introduction of vaccines, the creation of hospitals and the roles played by key local personalities such as Dr Lim Boon Keng and Tan Tock Seng, as well as the public campaigns aimed at encouraging a clean and hygienic environment – the effects of which are still prevalent today.

**Chung May Khuen, Director of the National Museum of Singapore**, says: "As the National Museum, we seek to not only reflect on but also respond to key events that have happened – and are happening – in Singapore, and through this, inspire conversations and connections among Singaporeans. *Every Body Plays a Part* is a timely response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and we hope that Singaporeans will take heart that what is now considered the 'new normal' has

been experienced in some form in the past, and we will get through this crisis, just as we have before.”

*Every Body Plays a Part* will feature four exhibits:

- **Exhibit A: *The Distancing of Bodies*** introduces one of the earliest accounts of social distancing and the practice of quarantine in Singapore through artefacts dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As passengers onboard ships often carried infectious diseases such as cholera, smallpox and measles, ports functioned as control zones to restrict the influx of such illnesses.



Postcard titled “St John’s Island”, *Straits Settlements*  
c1908

This coloured postcard shows immigrants with their belongings at the port on St John’s Island. From the 1900s, thousands of passengers and crew members passed through the island each year, where they were screened, quarantined and treated before being sent to Singapore. St John’s Island was fully equipped as a quarantine station by the 1930s, complete with modern store houses containing sulphur to fumigate ships, muster sheds for immigrants to change their clothes and shower, and hospitals and laboratories with vaccines stored in cooling chambers.

- **Exhibit B: *The Inoculation of Bodies*** features artefacts and documents related to vaccination practices and policies in Singapore over the years. Infectious diseases such as cholera, diphtheria and tuberculosis that were common were treated with vaccinations.



Diploma of the Royal Jennerian Society to Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles  
1825  
Gift of Tang Holdings Pte Ltd

This diploma was awarded to Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) by the Royal Jennerian Society on 30 March 1825 in recognition of his support for smallpox vaccination in Java.

The Royal Jennerian Society was founded on 19 January 1803 by Edward Jenner (1749–1823) to promote smallpox vaccination and eliminate the disease through inoculation. The Prince and Princess of Wales were patrons of the society. Jenner is represented in this diploma as a statue on a bas-relief depicting a cow with a milkmaid and children. He holds in his hands the dead python of disease – smallpox. The illustration alludes to his first experiment in which he took pus from cowpox lesions to provide protection against smallpox. A glimpse of London can be seen through the triumphal arch with the Royal Arms, which features scrolls bearing the names of the society's members.

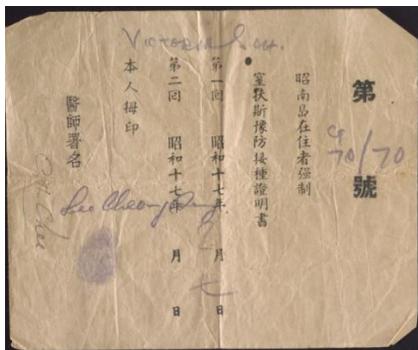


*A portrait of Municipal Health Officer Dr W. R. C. Middleton*  
1928

This oil painting of Dr William Robert Covin Middleton by the Russian artist, Anatole Shister, was one of three portraits placed in the committee room of the new Municipal Offices in 1929.

Depicted in this portrait as a genial figure, Middleton served as the Municipal Health Officer for 27 years (1893–1920). He addressed major issues plaguing public health at the time and put in place several health measures which are still practised today. He also made several recommendations to improve local water supply and sanitation, which were key factors in controlling the spread of diseases such as cholera.

In 1920, the quarantine facility known as the Isolation Hospital (begun in 1913) on Moulmein Road was renamed Middleton Hospital. This became a branch of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in 1985, when it was renamed the Communicable Disease Centre (CDC). In 2018, the CDC was closed and its operations moved to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), a new building opposite TTSH. This new facility with 330 beds was inaugurated in 2019.



*A vaccination certificate issued during the Japanese Occupation  
1942*

*Gift of Low Sze Wee*

This certificate indicates that two vaccines for both smallpox and typhus were issued, listed here as “第一” (number one) and “第二” (number two). The certificate also includes space for the thumbprint of the person being vaccinated (“本人拇印”) and the doctor's name.

Fearing the spread of diseases, the Japanese implemented a system of compulsory vaccination against smallpox and typhus in April 1942. Those who were inoculated were issued with certificates such as the one featured here. The *Shonan Shimbun* claimed that by June 1942, over 600,000 people had been vaccinated against typhoid and over 300,000 against smallpox, as compared to less than 30,000 before the war.

S.M.D. 407  
B.C.G. TESTING AND VACCINATION  
NGEE ANN GIRLS' SCHOOL School  
P. 6 A Standard  
Name Heng Hian Ann  
Age 12 Sex F No. 52/62  
16 FEB 1962 Test Pet. Heng  
B.C.G. Vaccine  
Dr. (Mrs) M. Chia L.H.O. S.T.O.  
L.H.O.S., H.O.S.

*Certificate of BCG testing and vaccination  
1962*

Since the mid-1950s, this slip of paper has come to mark a rite of passage for Primary Six schoolchildren in Singapore, as is the resultant mark on their arm. The Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccination is meant to provide immunisation against tuberculosis meningitis among children.

The BCG vaccination was first introduced in Singapore in 1957, but was met with initial reservations within the medical community. In 1959, Dr N. C. Sen Gupta, Medical Director of Singapore's Anti-Tuberculosis Association, wrote to *The Straits Times* to express his concern should BCG vaccination be made compulsory, since the medical research behind the BCG was fairly new at the time. However, the efficacy of BCG vaccinations soon allayed these concerns.

In the past, children were required to receive BCG injections twice: once at the infant stage, with a revaccination done by health officials in schools about 12 years later. However, since 2001, BCG revaccination has been phased out by the Ministry of Health.

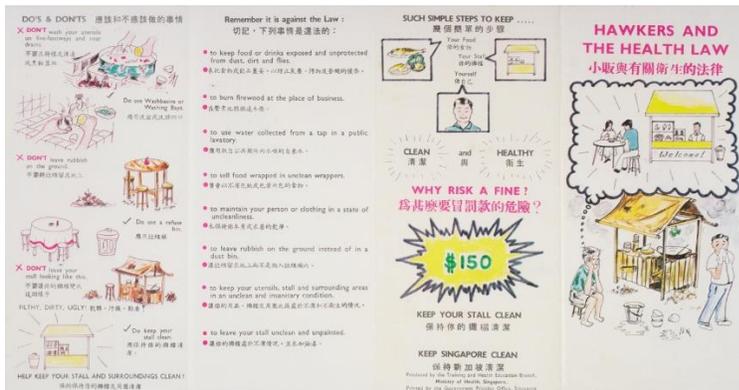
- **Exhibit C: The Hygiene of Bodies** explores the contributions of Dr Lim Boon Keng, one of Singapore's pioneering social reformers, as well as the role of playgrounds and public campaigns in helping Singaporeans cultivate good hygiene habits to safeguard public health, and to stay active and healthy.



Portrait of Lim Boon Keng  
Mid 20<sup>th</sup> century

Often described as “Singapore’s Grand Old Man”, Dr Lim Boon Keng was one of the country’s eminent social reformers in the late 19th to early 20th century. As a Justice of the Peace, Legislative Councillor, Municipal Commissioner and Chinese Advisory Board member, Lim bridged the gap between the British and Chinese worlds in Singapore and highlighted the plight of the city’s poor to the colonial authorities. Trained as a doctor in Edinburgh, Lim also visited brothels to treat prostitutes and certified the deaths of those who had died from infectious diseases. An enquiry commission he headed in 1896 revealed terrible living conditions for most of the city’s inhabitants, and recommended sanitary improvements to public works.

The portrait of Lim Boon Keng is currently on display in the Crown Colony section of the Singapore History Gallery.



“Hawkers and The Health Law” booklet  
1980s

Between the early 1970s and 1980s, Singapore food vendors relocated to hawker centres as part of the government's efforts to promote public hygiene and keep Singapore clean. This illustrated 1980s booklet marks the government's efforts at promoting public hygiene to hawkers, especially against gastro-intestinal infections such as cholera, dysentery and typhoid. It includes instructions on maintaining good hygiene and a clean environment, as well as information on the penalty for failing to adhere to the suggestions.



*Thermometer and notebook used to record temperature readings during the SARS outbreak 2008*

*Gift of Low Jyue Tyan*

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the highly contagious viral infectious disease, broke out in Singapore in early 2003. SARS was caused by the SARS coronavirus. Like COVID-19, it caused breathing problems, with the infected developing a high fever with chills. People were encouraged to monitor their temperatures regularly. Other measures implemented at the time, which seem very similar to the ones practised today, included wearing a mask, covering one's face when coughing, washing one's hands regularly and keeping a clean environment.

- **Exhibit D: The Restoration of Bodies** showcases images related to early hospitals and medical halls that played a major role in helping the sick. It also features non-medical options that have been used to restore one's health over the years, some of which are still available today. The COVID-19 virus that has afflicted millions globally has made us acutely aware of the fragility of our bodies, and ignited a race against time to find a cure. Attempts to develop vaccines to shield ourselves against the infection continue to be made across the world.



*Image of Tan Tock Seng Hospital  
c1876*

This photograph shows the second site of Tan Tock Seng Hospital at Serangoon Road near the junction of Balestier Road. Built with a generous donation by the philanthropist Tan Tock Seng in 1844, the first hospital was located in Pearl's Hill and called the Chinese Pauper Hospital.

The hospital moved several times over the years, before shifting to its current location in Novena in 2000. Its site at Balestier-Serangoon was handed to the Cantonese community to build the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital.

After transitioning into a general hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital has achieved many firsts in the fields of neurology, cardiology, rheumatology and geriatrics in Singapore. During the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, the hospital served as a quarantine facility to treat infected patients.



*A set of acupuncture needles used in a traditional Chinese medical hall  
Early to mid-20th century*

Acupuncture is a technique commonly practised in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Needles such as these are inserted into specific meridians in the body to stimulate the flow of life force known

as “qi” and to restore balance. The technique is used to treat various types of ailments. In addition to inserting the needle, the doctor gently twirls it and sometimes applies electrical pulses.



*Packaging for Brand's Essence of Chicken, UK  
1950s-1970s*

The original recipe for Brand's Essence of Chicken dates to the early 19th century and is attributed to Henderson William Brand, the royal chef in Buckingham Palace in the United Kingdom. To help the ailing King George IV regain his health, Brand devised an essence of chicken drink. In 1835, Brand retired and recreated his recipe for commercial sale to the sick. In 1897, the monarchy issued a Royal Warrant in recognition of the product's quality. By the 1920s, this well-known tonic began to be sold in Asia where it proved to be a great success as a health supplement. In 1999, the first Brand's Museum opened in Taiwan.



*Container for Hacks brand cough drops  
c1940*

“Hacks” medicated sweets and cough mixtures have been produced by the British company White Hudson in Southport, England, since the 1900s. Today, they are world famous. “Hacks” was first marketed in Singapore in the 1950s. Its local sole agent was Barkath Stores, an Indian Muslim business which gained a name for the brand here. Additional flavours were later introduced.

In 1962, the Singapore High Court granted an injunction restraining a Singapore company, Asian Organisation Limited, from allegedly passing off its “Pecto” medicated cough sweets as “Hacks” medicated cough drops. The “cough sweet row” even went up to the Privy Council in London.

As part of its public engagement efforts to broaden Singapore’s contemporary collection, the National Museum also invites residents in Singapore to contribute objects and accompanying stories and photos to its ongoing *Collecting Contemporary Singapore: Documenting COVID-19 in Singapore* initiative. The public can visit <https://go.gov.sg/nms-ccs-covid19> for more information or to submit a contribution.

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**About the National Museum of Singapore**

With a history dating back to 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is the nation’s oldest museum with a progressive mind. Its galleries adopt cutting-edge and multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture to redefine conventional museum experience. A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum hosts innovative festivals and events all year round—the dynamic Night Festival, visually arresting art installations, as well as amazing performances and film screenings—in addition to presenting thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts. The programming is supported by a wide range of facilities and services including F&B, retail and a Resource Centre. The National Museum of Singapore re-opened in December 2006 after a three-year redevelopment. It refreshed its permanent galleries and re-opened them in September 2015 for Singapore’s Golden

Jubilee. In 2017, it celebrated its 130th anniversary. For more details, please visit [www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg) or follow the National Museum on [Facebook](#) @National.Museum.of.Singapore and on [Instagram](#) @Natmuseum\_SG.

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