

PANIC BUYING



DESCRIPTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Singapore has presented a global health crisis that compels us as a community to band together and do our part to fight the virus as one people.

In response to the COVID-19, we witnessed instances of panic buying in our community – surgical masks, groceries and other essentials were emptied off the shelves. What were the events leading up to the panic buying situation, why did that happen and what can we as individuals do in this time?

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Understand and analyse the context of situations we observe around us
 - How can we lead positively in situations like this to be the voice of reason and assurance for those around us?
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PANIC BUYING

Influence and gain commitment from people

PANIC BUYING – Part 1 (Masks)

23 JANUARY 2020 FIRST COVID-19 CASE IN SINGAPORE



24 JANUARY 2020 MASKS RAN OUT OF STOCK

N95, surgical masks run out at retail outlets; MOH assures public there is enough stock



IN THE FOLLOWING WEEKS...



IN THE FOLLOWING WEEKS...



SETTING CONTEXT

On 23rd Jan 2020, Singapore confirmed our first case of COVID-19.

COVID-19 stands for Coronavirus Disease 2019. Many think that the disease began spreading in 2020 because it was the year that it blew up. However, the disease was first discovered in December 2019 at Wuhan, China.

Just a day after the confirmation, masks ran out of stock at pharmacies and supermarkets.

In the following weeks, long queues formed outside pharmacies, supermarkets and shops as people bought boxes of surgical masks as well as N95 masks.

Information on the locations of shops selling masks were disseminated rapidly online, mainly through social media platforms. As a result, crowds converge into these shops to pick up boxes and boxes of masks.

WHAT DRIVES PEOPLE TO HOARD MASKS?

IS PANIC BUYING JUSTIFIED?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE HOARD MASKS?

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UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Discussion Question: What drives people to hoard masks?

- Why do people hoard masks?
- Do you know of anyone who hoarded masks?
- What/who are they buying the masks for?
- Would you hoard the masks? Why or why not?

Landing point: Not all mask-buying behaviour is driven by profiteering or “kiasu-ism”. We need to understand that some people buy it to protect their loved ones, especially if they have elderly and children at home because they are more susceptible to being infected.

Having understood this, are people who buy masks with the intention of protecting their loved ones in the wrong?

Discussion Question: Is panic buying justified?

- Why did some people rush to panic buy, why did others not do so?
- What are some of the assumptions/ beliefs that drive the panic buying behaviour? E.g. Singaporeans have the assumption that Singapore does not have sufficient stockpile of essentials

Discussion Question: What happens when people hoard masks?

- What happens when we run out of stock?
- Overtime, what might happen if we are unable to replenish our stock?
- Who is vulnerable and left out? Who suffers from mask shortage/ the surge of mask prices?
 - o Frontline Healthcare workers
 - o Security/Tourism/Service/Transport sector works
 - o Vulnerable population (elderly and children)
 - o Sickly people in dire need of masks

IMPACT OF PANIC BUYING

The most immediate impact of panic buying of masks is of course a shortage of masks. This especially affects the people who really need them – the frontline workers, vulnerable, sick.

With shortage comes inflated prices, which in turn affects the poor and needy who might not be able to afford them.

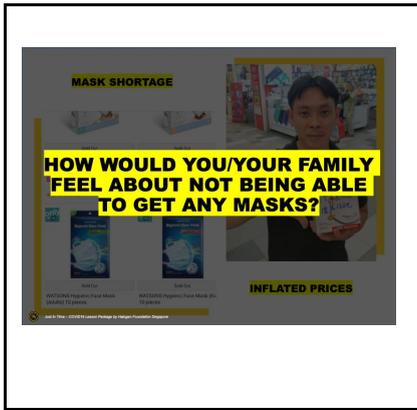
MASK SHORTAGE



INFLATED PRICES

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Discussion Question: How would you/ your family feel about not being able to get any masks?

Educator may share his/ her own experience

- Especially if all your neighbours, relatives and friends have huge stocks of masks and you see news of new infections every day?
- How do you relate to the people hoarding masks?

PANIC BUYING – Part 2 (Essentials)



BUILDING CONTEXT – PROGRESSION OF SITUATION

In a matter of 2 weeks, the situation escalated. We had cases of COVID-19 that were neither linked to previous cases nor was it spread from someone who had any recent travel history to China. This led to the speculation that there was local community spread. As a result, the Ministry of Health raised the Disease Outbreak Response System Outbreak (DORSCON) alert level from Yellow to Orange.

Educators may need to give more context of what DORSCON mean.

DORSCON is a colour-coded framework that shows the current disease situation. The framework provides us with the general guidelines on what needs to be done to prevent and reduce the spread of the virus.

[Recall]

Do you remember what happened in schools after the DORSCON was raised to orange?

- Suspension of inter-school and external activities (including national school games, learning journeys, camps etc.)
- Suspensions of mass activities such as morning assemblies
- Staggered recess timings (and perhaps dismissal timings)
- CCAs to be conducted in small groups
- Daily temperature taking

**7 FEBRUARY 2020
THE SAME EVENING...**



**7 FEBRUARY 2020
THE SAME EVENING...**



**WHAT CAUSED THE
PANIC BUYING?**

**WHAT MADE THE
SITUATION WORSE?**

Discussion Question: What was the immediate reaction of the general public?

- What was your immediate response?
 - o Possible response: Sad because I miss out on the fun events (e.g. orientation)

The same evening, we saw long queues in the supermarkets as people rushed to stock up on essentials such as rice, instant noodles, canned food, toilet paper etc.

We also saw the shelves of our supermarkets being wiped clean of stock, leaving rows and rows of empty shelves.

Discussion Question: What do you think caused the panic buying of essentials?

- Do you think the reasons for the bulk purchase of essentials were valid?
- What are some valid concerns and reasons? Why?
 - o People foresee the DORSCON level going red. Hence they want to stock up on food so they do not have to go out to purchase food when the DORSCON level turns red.
- What behaviours/ reasons for bulk purchasing do you think are exaggerated or unreasonable? Why?
- How is this behaviour similar/ different from what we saw in the panic buying of masks?

Discussion Question: What made the situation worse?

- Considering that the panic buying situation happened within hours of DORSCON Orange, all the way till past midnight – Where did this urgency come from?
- Who caused the alarm?
 - o Family members? Friends' WhatsApp chats? Social media inducing panic?

Landing point: Our response to a situation has an impact on others. If we engage in unsubstantiated fear-driven behaviour, it creates an impact on others' response. We might be spreading fear within our networks. Similarly,

PANIC BUYING SCENE ON SOCIAL MEDIA



we can also be spreading calm and reason within our networks.

[Video] Panic Buying Scene on Social Media

- Imagine if you open your social media apps and you see a scene like this, what is your immediate response?
- What are some accompanying captions you might see?
 - o Captions calling for calm - "This is unwarranted. Our supply chains are intact, don't worry!"
 - o Captions shaming the buyers – "Look at these people overreacting, haha!"
 - o Captions causing alarm – "We are running low on essentials! Come buy now!"
- How would you react to these videos/ photos/ texts?

PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED THEM – NO ACCESS



Panic buying deprives people of access to essentials that they really need. For example, a diabetic has no access to alcohol swabs. Some diabetic patients need to administer insulin jabs as their body does not produce enough/any insulin to regulate blood glucose level. Hence, they need alcohol swabs to disinfect the skin before administering the insulin jab. These patients typically need at least 1 jab a day.

Discussion Question: What will be the consequence?

Without alcohol swabs, they won't be able to administer the jabs. Won't that increase the work for doctors and nurses at hospitals? This adds fuel to fire.

LONG QUEUES & ABANDONED BASKETS



As we have already seen, they were long queues in the supermarkets. What was worse was how shoppers, upon seeing the long queues, decide to give up queuing and abandon their baskets all over the floor.

Discussion Question: Who is responsible for repacking these baskets? What about the frozen food?

- How about the supermarket staff restocking the shelves to prepare for the following day?

On 15 February 2020,
we commemorated Total Defence Day



**WHAT DOES PANIC BUYING
REVEAL ABOUT OUR
PREPAREDNESS AS A NATION?**

Discussion Question: Having just gone through Total Defence Day and emphasising the 6 pillars of Total Defence, what does panic buying reveal about our preparedness as a nation?

Educators to recap the 6 pillars of Total Defence: Military, Civil, Economic, Social, Psychological and Digital defence

- As a nation, what did we do well?
- What do we need to work on?

PANIC BUYING – Part 3 (Solutions)

**1 FEBRUARY 2020
FREE MASKS FOR EVERY
HOUSEHOLD**

Singapore

Singapore households to get 4 face masks each amid worries over Wuhan virus

Image by The Straits Times (2020) Content Provided by Singapore Foundation Education

Source: Singapore Press Photo

**WE STARTED
TO SEE
GROUND-UP
INITIATIVES**

**FREE MASKS
& SANITISERS
IN LIFTS**



Image by The Straits Times (2020) Content Provided by Singapore Foundation Education

Source: Singapore Press Photo

DISTRIBUTION OF FREE MASKS

Heroes Unmasked: Couple and friends give away 6,600 free masks after procuring them with own money



Image by The Straits Times (2020) Content Provided by Singapore Foundation Education

Source: Singapore Press Photo

CONCEPTUALISING SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS WITHIN OWN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

On 1st Feb 2020, the government released masks from the national stockpile, gathered personnel from the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), People's Association (PA) and other agencies to prepare and pack masks in special packs for Singaporeans. Each household is eligible to collect 4 masks from the nearby Community Centres (CCs) and Residents' Committee (RC) Centres.

Beyond the government's intervention, we started to see ground-up initiatives in the community – neighbours leaving masks and hand sanitisers in the lift for people who need them.

Or Samaritans distributing free masks for the public and vulnerable groups. Ms Jennifer Le and her family and friends used their own money to buy and distribute masks for free at Sengkang, Toa Payoh and Hougang.



"OF COURSE YOU MUST TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST. AFTER YOU HAVE ENOUGH, THEN YOU CAN HELP OTHER PEOPLE."

— MS. JENNIFER LE

AMIDST THE FEAR AND PANIC, HOW CAN WE BE THE VOICE OF REASON AND ASSURANCE?



[Video] Hear from Ms Jennifer Le herself on her motivations for distributing masks

Ms Jennifer Lee said "Of course, you must take care of yourself first. After you have enough, then you can help other people." We mustn't forget others who need our support.

Reflection: **For those of us who have enough, how can we help other people? What else can we do if we cannot offer financial help?**

- Take responsibility of personal hygiene
- Volunteer to give out masks to communities in need of them
- Don't add fuel to fire: Buy enough for yourself, don't buy excessively.

Discussion Question: **Knowing how social media can quickly breed urgency and panic, how can we be the voice of reason and assurance for those around us?**

Landing point: Lead with a positive response:

- Fact-check news spreading on social media networks
- Question own assumptions and beliefs
- Form an informed opinion about things going on around us
- Inject reason and assurance through our interactions with others