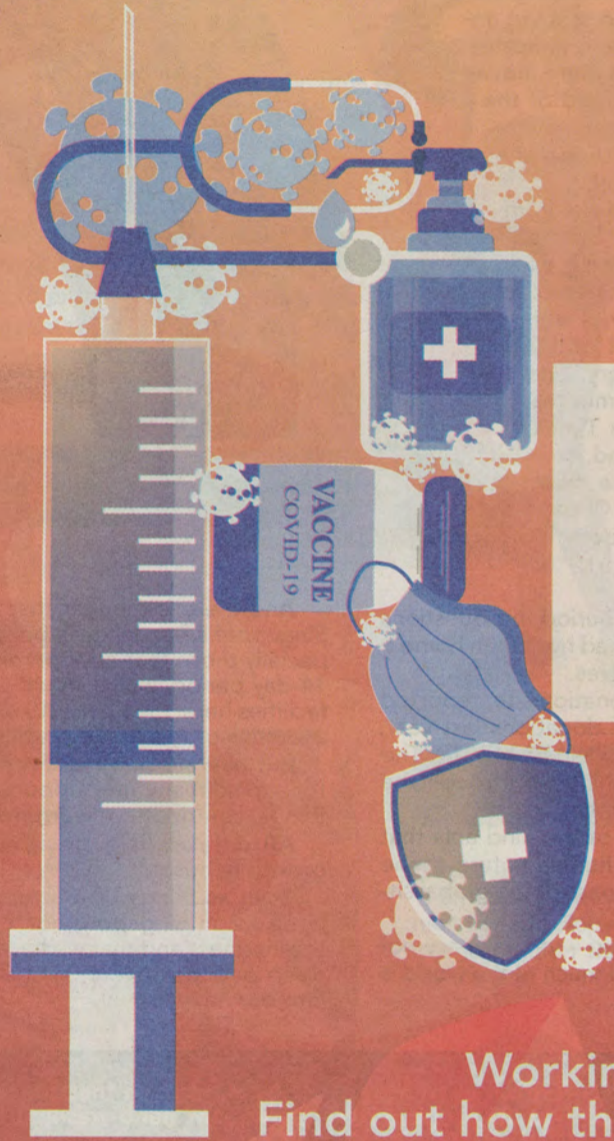




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THE STRAITS TIMES



# READY FOR THE LONG HAUL

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**TRAIN YOUR BRAIN**  
The right mindset is key to resilience. p4-6

**SECURED SUPPLIES**  
How the nation keeps food flowing in. p12-13



# Learning to think safe in a virtual space

**S**cene: A classroom. The teacher announces that everyone will be playing a game today. On their computers, the students explore a virtual Housing Board estate, which has spaces like shops and playgrounds.

After a while, the teacher reveals that the majority of the students' avatars have been infected with Covid-19.

All this took place in the Socially Responsible Behaviour through Embodied Thinking Project, or Sorbet for short. It was developed in April last year by research scientist Kenneth YT Lim, 53, and his team from the Office of Education Research, in the National Institute of Education (NIE).

Along with six student interns, he created a virtual experience to teach students how viruses transmit and what social distancing does. Teachers had told Dr Lim that many of their students did not understand those concepts.



Dr Kenneth YT Lim (centre) designed the game to let students understand the consequences of their actions in a Covid-19 environment. His team included (from left) Mr Tan Boon Hing, 23, research assistant Ahmed Hazyl Hilmy, 37, as well as student interns Terence Teo Li Yang and Tristan Tay Yu Hng.

ST PHOTO TIMOTHY DAVID

The game was conducted in a few secondary schools from July to November last year.

Sorbet was designed this way to let students understand the consequences of their actions, said Dr Lim.

Saying there was a day's time lag between the case numbers released by the Government and people's interactions during the "circuit-breaker", he said: "So in other words, none of us got any positive or negative feedback on our decision making and behaviour."

Two of Dr Lim's interns, Lee Zhi Yan, Natalie and

Aurelia Azifa Chelfannisa, both 15 and from Cedar Girls' Secondary School, took it up a notch and tried a social experiment instead. Upon telling their classmates of the virus and that it had a low transmission rate, they found that their classmates social distanced less.

However, the experience proved to be meaningful. Said Aurelia: "After we surveyed our classmates, all of them said that they understood why they had to be responsible and social distance. So I think the game really changed their mindsets."

Muhammad Noor Issac Rafinyi, 16, and Taarun Mohan, 15, from Temasek Junior College, coded a soccer match to observe how their peers would behave and social distance in a contact sport setting. While researching existing measures put in place for sports, Issac said that "a lot of (them) have a lot of reasons behind them, even if we don't really see it as normal people".

Tristan Tay Yu Hng and Terence Teo Li Yang, both 16 and from St Joseph's Institution, coded buses and vehicles for a transit system. Dr Lim said that this created an interesting instance where some participants got trapped on a crowded bus and it became "a literal and metaphorical vehicle for virus transmission", giving the participants a rare case study to understand how viruses can spread rapidly.

Dr Lim is currently in the midst of applying for funding from NIE and has plans to use elements of his interns' work to create a Sorbet app for mobile devices.

If successful, the game could come out some time this year, bringing the Sorbet experience to even more schools.

Brenda Lee