First structured biosafety training programme launched in Singapore
By Eileen Poh | Posted: 05 Feb 2015 12:27 | Updated: 06 Feb 2015 00:16

The new training programme is the latest in a series of efforts aimed at raising Singapore's capabilities in managing infectious diseases.

SINGAPORE: A new training programme was launched on Thursday (Feb 5), to better equip healthcare professionals to handle bio-hazardous materials.

It is the first structured training programme in biosafety, and was developed by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency with industry stakeholders and the Health Ministry.

The programme is the latest in a series of efforts aimed at raising Singapore's capabilities in managing infectious diseases.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower Dr Amy Khor said biosafety issues have been drawing much attention, especially with the outbreak of threats such as the H5N1 and Ebola viruses recently.

She said: "The increasingly high traffic across borders and high density populations has made it more challenging to deal with these threats. While Singapore has thus far been spared, we must not take this for granted. We must remain vigilant."

Dr Khor also said a key focus for Singapore should be to ensure that those who work in biomedical labs in schools, research institutes, hospitals and biologics plants are well-trained to handle biological agents safely.

Singapore has more than 7,100 biomedical science researchers, she said. Another 1,700 employees are also hired at six Biologics Manufacturing facilities.

The Biosafety Training Structure launched on Thursday aims to offer standardised training for the industry. The programme comprises three levels of training.

The first is the Biosafety Induction Programme - a basic course for laboratories users who will come into contact with biological agents.

The remaining two levels - the Biosafety Professional Programme and the Professional Certification for Continued Education - are targeted at experienced employees at the operation and management level.

Those in the industry said the programme will provide assurance to employers that their staff are adequately trained.

Ms Sindhu Ravindran, Senior Manager and Trainer in Biosafety Level 3 Operations at Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore said: "It is a common platform where there is a standardised procedures and practices in biosafety.

"The employees can apply this across organisations. Whether it is in NUS, NTU or other research institutions, the procedures and practices will remain the same. As a trainer, I need not emphasise or retrain all these users every time they come to work with us. So, it really reduces substantially a good part of the trainers' time, and we can utilise that for something else."

Other than training those already in the industry, tertiary institutions including the Singapore Institute of Technology, Temasek Polytechnic and Singapore Polytechnic will be including biosafety training as part of their teaching materials for students. A total of 600 students are expected to benefit from this initiative each year.

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