

# Potential Covid-19 hotspots to be revealed as HIDE takes effect



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**NATION**

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PETALING JAYA: A list of potential Covid-19 hotspots will be published by the government starting today, as the movement control order is reimposed in certain states.

The Health Ministry is expected to reveal the Hotspots Identification for Dynamic Engagement (HIDE) system and the list of potential hotspots that it predicts.

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba said more information would be revealed today.

While Malaysians are glad for the system, businesses are worried that such a list will incite fear and panic.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca) president Datuk Dr Marimuthu Nadason said it's a good move to have the system in place.

"It is a good system in the sense that people can decide for themselves where they want to go or areas they want to avoid," he said.

He, however, noted that the system must be managed well to ensure the right data and information were provided, or it could be damaging to businesses.

The National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme coordinating minister Khairy Jamaluddin said earlier this week that Malaysians would be able to identify

which locations, such as shopping malls or eateries, were potential Covid-19 hotspots under HIDE.

The early warnings issued by HIDE uses big data analytics and artificial intelligence through contact

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"HIDE is predictive, not reactive. In the past, contact tracing is done when a patient is tested positive for Covid-19 but with HIDE, it does both forward and backward contact tracing.

"It will be able to predict if that particular area will be responsible for more transmissions in the future," he said.

Khairy also held an engagement session yesterday with six PKR MPs on the vaccination programme and the HIDE system.

Gopeng MP Dr Lee Boon Chye said the discussion was mainly centred on the mechanics of the HIDE system in predicting possible Covid-19 hotspots.

He added it would trace a Covid-19 patient's movements before and after they experienced symptoms and match these with others who were experiencing symptoms, to pinpoint potential hotspot locations.

Manpower issues, he said, were brought up during the discussion as the HIDE system would require personnel to mine the data and also take action based on those insights.

"We did raise the point that there must be people to not only mine the data, but to also enforce the SOP, conduct contact tracing and mass testing.

"A few days ago, the Health Ministry had approval to employ over 8,000 contract healthcare workers, so we hope that their efforts can be expedited," he said.

Accountant Veronica Wong, 35, said HIDE system would be useful and beneficial to the public.

"Once it's launched, I would be able to know if a place is going to be a potential Covid-19 hotspot and then I can avoid it.

"I believe the government should have implemented this much earlier and it would have prevented Covid-19 cases from spiralling out of control," she said.

Homemaker Lily Yong, 57, said the data that the system provide would be able to help her family avoid potential hotspot areas.

Businesses however are concerned such a system may lead to stigma around these locations, adding that shopping malls and eateries have been trying to adhere to the SOP.

Malaysia Shopping Malls Association said there should be greater clarity about hotspots in shopping malls so as to not create fear among the public.

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It added that clusters emerged mostly from factories, making up about 48% of clusters from Feb 22 to April 2.

“In the past, positive cases have also been wrongly attributed to particular shopping malls although they actually occurred in the vicinity of the mall,” it said.

Sunway Malls and Theme Parks chief executive officer HC Chan said while it lauded the HIDE system, the information given must not create undue public concern.

He said it was important to differentiate if the presence of Covid-19 cases or close contacts at the malls were just short stays.

“It is important to understand if these cases are merely short stays at these malls, or if they got infected at these malls.

“It is also important to consider factors like adherence to SOP, sanitisation frequency, duration and proximity of such cases.

“The positive side of this system is that it will enable a more targeted approach in intervention methods. Resources can be diverted and better optimised,” he said.

Bumiputera Retailers Organisation president Datuk Ameer Ali Mydin said the retailers or shopping malls could be stigmatised under the system.

“All the shopping malls and retailers are already following the required SOP.

“We can’t be faulted as we wouldn’t know if someone has Covid-19 and is asymptomatic.

“The shopping malls or retailers would be named and shamed, and the repercussions would be disastrous. It will take months for us to recover.

“The government can use the data to list out general areas, for instance, Ampang or Bangsar, but not specific shopping complexes.

“The government can use the HIDE report for enforcement, but not for the public to view,” he said.

Malaysian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association president Datuk Jawahar Ali Taib Khan agreed that it was a good idea but is concerned about the public boycotting certain premises.

“It won’t help businesses, especially eateries, as we are already suffering. It is not wise to create fear among customers,” he said.

Malaysia-Singapore Coffeeshop Proprietors’ General Association president Wong Teu Hoon said its

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