No need to avoid places visited by Covid-19 cases

As Singapore continues to reopen its economy, more people are out and about, adding to the list of places visited by those with Covid-19. How do we know if these places were most visited by Covid-19 cases in the past week?

The Ministry of Health (MOH) provides a daily list of places visited by Covid-19 cases for at least half an hour, for the past 14 days. The entries are updated on a rolling basis, and the full list is available on the website. Close contacts are also notified. There is no need to avoid these places as they have already been cleaned.

How long is the list?

In the last few weeks, those infected with Covid-19 visited more than 90 places, though it is not stated if the same person visited multiple locations. Shopping malls were the most visited, including 12 in Orchard Road and about 26 in eateries such as Joe Kam and Pas Sta.

Marinas and hawker centres also feature on the list, such as the Old Airport Road Food Centre and Shopping Mall and Chinatown Complex Food Centre. The following locations had the most number of repeated visits: Block 4A Jalan Bahru Hawker Centre (10), Lucky Plaza (6), VivoCity (5), Geylang Serai Market and Food Centre (4), Wisma Atta (3), Bugis Junction (3), Home Team NSKhadi (3) and Bukit Panjang Plaza (3).

What should I do if I visited these places at the time named on the list?

Monitor your health closely for two weeks from the date of your visit. If you have a fever, lose your sense of taste or smell, or develop symptoms of acute respiratory infection such as a cough, sore throat and runny nose, see a doctor promptly. Inform the doctor of your exposure history.

Should I avoid the places listed?

It is safe to visit these locations. Research shows that the risk of infection through fomites is low, said Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore. Fomites are objects that are likely to carry the virus, like furnishings. Prof Teo added that the main mode of transmission is still through droplets as a result of human-to-human interactions in close proximity.

All the places on the MOH list have been thoroughly cleaned and the work done under the supervision of the National Environment Agency’s (NEA) officers. NEA has guidelines on how the cleaning and disinfection should be done. To date, NEA officers have attended to more than 3,500 premises, of which the majority are residences of confirmed cases.

How frequently are the premises cleaned?

NEA’s guidelines require 22 recommended steps. These include the appropriate temperature to wash linen and instructions on how to dispose of personal protective equipment worn by the cleaners.

If property owners and operators are not able to carry out the cleaning themselves, NEA has a list of companies that can be engaged for a cleaning job. Clean Lab, for example, has a crew of three and five trained specialists to each location. The specialties correspond to Covid-19 decontamination requests.

Other companies such as Aardwolf Ventures and Docusys Property Management said they use active ingredients recommended by NEA in the disinfectant solutions, for targeting areas touched by community hard-to-reach spots.

In the case of restaurants, businesses such as Mjoj and Pirty restaurant were checked on the health of their staff after finding out that their premises had been visited by Covid-19 patients. A spokesperson for Pirty said “guaranteed all relevant staff” upon finding out that its outlet at Wheelock Place was affected.

In a cleaning blitz launched if customers and staff operations find out that their premises have been visited by Covid-19 patients only several days after the visit.

Out of a total of 27 locations, some are marked as high-risk locations, where premises may find out they were visited by patients up to 10 days after the day of the visit. For instance, eight visits to various locations on Aug 19 were added as locations on Aug 24 were added 14 days after they were visited.

Prof Teo said: “The Sars-CoV-2 virus can survive on surfaces for days, and studies have shown a viable lifetime of up to three weeks in chilled environments of around 1°C. So, it is certainly not good practice to perform the disinfection protocols.”

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