On Friday, Prime Minister Hun Sen allowed the Ministry of Health to reveal the identities of the COVID-19 people, including their photos, names, and addresses to track down those coming in contact with them.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), said that the public health crisis does not warrant the total abandonment of the right to privacy and data rights.

“The government must practice data minimisation and limit its processing of personal information of COVID-19 patients, only recording what is strictly necessary,” she said.

“The sharing of personal data, or personally identifiable information, is a violation of the right to privacy if alternative methods are available that don’t compromise the privacy of individuals,” she added.
The General Director of prisons, Lt General Chhem Savuth and wife, whose family have been found to be infected with COVID-19. Now identities are to be revealed to assist in expediting contact tracing. Supplied

Sopheap said the government’s decision to name COVID-19 patients and share a photo of them puts those individuals at risk of discrimination and harm from the public.

“We implore the government to exercise the utmost caution when releasing information about positive cases and to explore all alternative less restrictive, measures of contract tracing to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 among the community.”

Am Sam Ath, deputy director of monitoring for human rights Licadho, agreed that the move violated thr individual’s right but it helps prevent or minimise the community outbreak.
“Disclosing names and photos of COVID-19 patients in public is to let people in direct and indirect contact with someone infected with COVID-19 be careful and they will not infect others. They will go for testing,” Sam Ath said.

“As a civil society entity, we call for a non-discriminatory effort against COVID-19 patients whose names are revealed to the public because no one wants to contract the disease,” he said.

Leap Chanthavy, a Cambodian political and social affairs analyst said that revealing the identities of affected patients was a question of which is a lesser burden. That of life, as the Prime Minister as said or that of privacy in which case, the possibility of silent carriers of the virus going around infecting others unknowingly increases,

“There may be views that this will stigmatise the COVID-19 patients when their privacy has been invaded but on the positive side, they are alive and receiving treatment and many others have come forward to get tested. This is a bigger positive. When an ambulance pulls up in front of the victims house with medical personnel dressed in hazmat suits it is clear to everybody who is in that area as to what is going on. So let us not over react. The government has to do what is necessary to contain the community outbreak before the numbers become unmanageable. “

From November 29 to December 6, the Health Ministry has tested a total of 11,305 people, of whom 32 were positive for the COVID-19 connected with the Nov 28 community incident.