

Two traders in hot soup for raising price of face masks

BY SHALINA R ON JANUARY 31, 2020, FRIDAY AT 10:10 AM



About 3,200 three-ply surgical face masks worth RM2,650 were seized by KPDNHEP in Sandakan on Wednesday.

KOTA KINABALU: Three traders in the state were found to have violated the Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act 2011 by raising the price of face masks above the maximum set by the government. Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry (KPDNHEP) Sabah director Georgie Abas said the three business premises were among the 130 outlets inspected statewide from Jan 26 until Wednesday (January 29).

He said two cases had been taken under the Price Control And Anti-Profitteering Act 2011 for selling face masks above the maximum price set whilst one case had involved a trader that had failed to place a price tag on the face masks sold at its premises.

"This (face mask as an item under the price control scheme) is nothing new. It's just that it has become a focus now because of the coronavirus issue," he told reporters at the Sabah Federal Government Administration Complex here yesterday.

"There is basis to the complaints that we have received. We have found the ones selling above the maximum price, involved one case in Kota Kinabalu where 50 units of N95 face mask units with the seizure

value of RM375 whilst another case was produced by the Sandakan branch, involving a seizure value of RM2,560 with a confiscation of 3,200 pieces of three-ply ear loop face surgical face masks.

"Further investigations will be conducted on the retailers involved and an unidentified supplier," he revealed.

"For the N95 that we have confiscated here, the retail price should be RM6 only... maximum. When we caught them, they were selling it at more than double that price.

"We want to emphasize, do not take advantage of the situation. This matter is about the welfare of the people," he said, adding KPDNHEP is going through the documents related to the sales of the N95 face masks of the retailer caught red-handed.

Georgie said face mask is an item on the price control list, with the ceiling price fixed for the five types of face masks.

The price for the N95 face mask has been set at a maximum wholesale price of RM100 per box and retail price of RM6 per unit, whilst the one-ply face mask (ear loop) is set at a maximum wholesale price of RM5 per box, or a retail price of RM7 per box.

Other types such as the two-ply face mask (ear loop) is fixed at a maximum wholesale price of RM8 per box, retail price of RM10 per box, or 20 sen per unit.

The three-ply face mask (ear loop/head loop) is set a maximum wholesale price of RM25 per box, or retail price of 80 sen per unit.

Meanwhile, the three-ply face mask (tie-on) is set at a maximum wholesale price of RM30 per box, or 80 sen per unit.

Georgie said organizations could face a maximum fine of RM100,000, whilst corporations could be fined up to RM50,000 or a maximum of two years imprisonment or both if found guilty.

Meanwhile, Georgie said the shortage of face masks mainly occurred at pharmacies located at Sabah's tourist-centric areas.

He said KPDNHEP Sabah has for the last few days looked into the public feedback regarding the lack of supply since it has become a "hot item" in the state since the emergence of the coronavirus.

"I would like to state that the people who are looking for face masks would normally go to the pharmacy first, it will be the focus, so obviously the stock will deplete," he said.

"But at the same time, the pharmacies will not normally keep much stock because the item is not something that people will always buy. However, when the coronavirus issue came up, it has become a hot item," he added.

Georgie said KPDNHEP Sabah had started the face mask supply inspection on premises since January 26 and is confident that the supply would be sufficient if suppliers expedite the distribution of face masks in the state.

"Based on our officers' inspection on retailers and wholesalers, we have found that most of these stock shortages happen at pharmacy premises in tourist areas, for example, Grand Plaza Mall, Gaya Street, Suria Sabah, Servay Hypermarket Inanam," he said.

"But at the same time, there are about 70,000 pieces of common face masks in a wholesaler's possession in Inanam, 1,000 pieces in a pharmacy on level three of Suria Sabah Mall, about 2,600 pieces in various premises in Centre Point Sabah, and quite a lot of stock too at a premises in 1Borneo (Hypermall).

"The involved wholesaler (in Inanam) has also started to distribute their existing stock to retailers around Kota Kinabalu since January 1, 2020, and today. Our officers will also check back to verify that the shipment has been made and the stock is available (at retailers)," he said.

● He added that KPDNHEP Sabah has discovered that a pharmacy with a network of 20 chain stores has started to import face masks from Australia and Europe as regular stocks from Singapore and Hong Kong have been suspended at this time.

He said other popular outlets that may have low face mask include 24-hour convenience stores.

However, Georgie said face masks can still be found in other places such as certain grocery and beauty stores.

"KPDNHEP is confident that the existing supply will be sufficient if the current stock distribution is dealt comprehensively to all areas, and the new orders that had been made arrive in the near future. The people are advised that there is no need to panic," he said regarding the supply of face masks, which is included in the KPDNHEP controlled goods item list.

"I have also noticed, there are pharmacies that have taken proactive steps to try and set a buying limit to the people. I think, personally, that is a good step," he added.

