

Ministry in talks to raise supply of face masks

Larissa Lumandan -January 30, 2020 2:43 PM



Face masks are in great demand following the coronavirus outbreak. (Bernama pic)

KUCHING: The domestic trade and consumer affairs ministry (KPDNHEP) is in talks with face mask suppliers to increase their supply in the domestic market, said deputy minister Chong Chieng Jen.

He said due to panic buying by the public following the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak, many retailers had sold out their stocks.

Although there were three face mask manufacturers in the country, they mainly focus on the export market and hospitals, he said.

"Most of the face masks sold in the local market are imported.

"Therefore, KPDNHEP enforcement director Iskandar Halim Sulaiman is having a meeting with the face masks suppliers on how to increase the supply for the local market," he said in a press conference here, today.

Chong also urged manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers not to take advantage of the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak to increase the prices of face masks and hand sanitiser products.

He said currently, there are five types of face masks which had been listed as price control items under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act 2011.

They are:

one-layered mask priced at RM5 per box (wholesale) or RM7 per box (retail);

two-layered mask priced at RM8 per box (wholesale) or RM10 per box (retail), or 20 sen per piece;

three-layered surgical mask priced at RM25 per box or 80 sen per piece;

three-layered hijab-friendly mask priced at RM30 per box or 80 sen per piece; and

N95 face mask which can be bought for RM100 per box or RM6 per piece.

Chong said members of the public who found any shop selling the five face masks above their respective prices should lodge a report at the KPDNHEP office.

"While the other types of face masks are not listed as price control items, they are still subject to the same act but under a different section which prohibits profiteering activities.

"Any act to arbitrarily hike the prices for unreasonable profit will also be an offence under the same act," Chong said.

Errant traders could face a maximum fine of RM100,000, or imprisonment for up to three years, or both, if found guilty, while companies could be fined up to RM500,000 or compound up to RM250,000, he added.

So far, Chong said, in Sarawak, the ministry had received 10 complaints from the public on the increase in prices of face masks.

"Our enforcement officers will take immediate action upon receiving such reports," he said, adding that 2,300 enforcement officers and 1,000 price checkers nationwide would also be carrying out inspections on outlets selling face masks.