

Saifuddin Nasution: No need to panic, face masks in sufficient supply

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People wearing face masks are pictured outside Pavilion Kuala Lumpur February 10, 2020. —
Picture by Firdaus Latif

PUTRAJAYA, 13 Feb — The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry today gave an assurance that there is a sufficient supply of three-ply face masks for the needs of the public, to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 infections.

Its minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said the government will purchase ready stock amounting to 400,000 masks from local manufacturers, and the strategy to be employed in distributing the masks will be announced to ensure that the public does not engage in panic buying.

“They (local manufacturers) have agreed to supply face masks, and we have identified the number of masks we need,” he said, explaining that he had reported the matter to the Cabinet and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is also the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) chairman.

Saifuddin Nasution said the ministry was also looking at other options including getting manufacturers “to produce more (masks) and we have agreed to facilitate whatever problems they might have”, adding that the ministry would place orders with manufacturers as soon as approval was received from the Finance Ministry.

On successive face mask orders which the government would make, consequent to the order for 400,000 pieces of ready stock, the minister said this would depend on the capacity of manufacturers, with some producers informing the ministry that they could produce 200,000 pieces daily, while others could produce 50,000 to 100,000 pieces per week.

He said this to reporters after attending a dialogue session here between his ministry and industry players on the impact of Covid-19 infections, and suggestions on how to address the situation.

Asked if face mask supplies could be received next week, Saifuddin Nasution replied: "As soon as possible. I was in communication with the Finance Minister this morning and we will do it soon."

He explained that the shortage of masks was caused by a spike in demand.

On whether the ministry would limit the purchase of hand sanitisers and face masks following complaints of bulk buying, he said such incidents had only taken place in certain states and there was no need for a limit to be imposed.

"I prefer to focus on ensuring that there are sufficient supplies with the support of producers," the minister added.

On today's dialogue session, Saifuddin Nasution said the ministry was taking note of the views and suggestions of industry players so that these could be conveyed to the offices of the Prime Minister and Finance Minister respectively, as the government was currently in the process of devising an economic stimulus package to be presented next month. — Bernama

