

Minister: Avoid panic buying of face masks

KUALA LUMPUR: The public has been reminded not to engage in panic purchasing of face masks as supply of the item dwindles due to the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said panic buying could cause uneasiness and tension.

"The ministry has received a lot of complaints on the insufficient supply of face masks. Our focus now is to ensure that local suppliers and importers of face masks increase supply of the item.

"We want to remind the public not to buy them out of panic as that could cause anxiety among consumers and lead people to buy the item in large quantities," he said at the launch of the Sub-regional Meeting of the Intellectual Property Office Officials Responsible for the Madrid System at the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia here.

Public fear caused by the coronavirus outbreak has led to high demand for surgical face masks and hand sanitisers.

Saifuddin said after a meeting between the ministry, suppliers and importers last week, local manufacturers and importers were told to increase their supply.

"At the meeting, we discussed and conducted some fact-finding on the sufficiency of face masks supply, as well as price control of the item. We only discussed the supply of face masks as it is a crucial item right now.

"This is the fastest solution we have for now. The face masks are



Tourists wearing face masks at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Only workers handling patients or suspected cases need to wear surgical face masks. FILE PIC



Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail

from China, Europe, the United States and Singapore.

"Before the outbreak, surgical and industrial masks were needed the most.

"Almost 90 per cent of face masks in the country was for minor uses. Demand for the item was only high during the haze."

He reminded retailers not to hike prices of the item as it was under the Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act 2011.

He said the ministry took action against two errant retailers.

Those found to have breached the directive are liable to a fine of up to RM100,000, up to three years' jail, or both, or a compound of RM50,000.

Traders found selling controlled items above the ceiling price face a fine of up to RM500,000 or a

compound of up to RM250,000.

Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society president Amrahi Buang said panic buying of face masks and hand sanitisers was caused by lack of knowledge on infection control and personal hygiene.

He said many people were unaware that face masks should be worn only by those handling patients or those working with suspected cases.

He said for the average person, consistently maintaining personal hygiene, such as washing hands with soap, was sufficient.

"For example, if everyone in the house is doing fine, then there is no need to wear face masks.

"Infections spread through droplets, human-to-human contact and the faecal-oral route. So if you understand how it works, the best thing you can do is wash your hands with soap. Even experts believe this is the best preventive measure."