

Face masks out of stock at many pharmacies

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PETALING JAYA: Pharmacies are still facing a shortage of face masks despite an increase in the production of three-ply masks during the current Covid-19 scare.

Checks with local pharmacies in the Klang Valley found that many were without stock and were unsure when the next available shipment would arrive.

Pharmacy operators said they were swamped with inquiries from the public on the availability of face masks.

In Puchong, a local pharmacy said they had face masks in stock earlier last week but they were all snapped up within a couple of hours.

U Pharm community pharmacy operations manager Lai Yet Kuan said there had been no improvement since the scarcity became evident a week after the Chinese New Year celebrations.

"We don't order directly from the manufacturers but from wholesalers. And the manufacturers have told my suppliers that they are short of stock and not able to supply them," she said when contacted.

Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society president Amrahi Buang has advised consumers against panic buying.

He said face masks should be

given to those who needed them most, especially healthcare frontliners.

He also urged consumers to be more aware of when masks were required.

"You should only use the mask if you are sick or have symptoms such as fever, sneezing or cough.

"If you have these symptoms then you should isolate yourself and wear the mask only when you need to go out.

"The other thing is to always maintain personal hygiene," he added.

Amrahi said consumers who were worried could also seek advice from pharmacists.

"They can talk to you about the virus and advise you if you need to see the doctor," he said.

The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry's Enforcement Division director Datuk Iskandar Halim Sulaiman said there had been instances of consumers buying the masks and sending them overseas.

"Many buy and send them to their friends and families overseas, though there are also some who do it for business.

"The ministry is seriously considering an export ban on face masks," he said when contacted.

Iskandar said this was based on information they had received from courier companies.

The ministry, he added, was in the midst of preparing the paperwork to enforce the ban as soon as possible.

Last month, the former Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said local manufacturers had been asked to increase the production of face masks by another 400,000 pieces daily to ensure sufficient supply in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak.