

Ministry warns stern action will be taken against traders who hike prices of face masks

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KUCHING: The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry will take action against traders who hike the prices of face masks and hand sanitiser products in the wake of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak.

Deputy minister Chong Chieng Jen said 2,300 enforcement officers and 1,000 price checkers nationwide will carry out inspections on outlets selling the items to ensure they comply with price regulations.

He said five types of face masks were listed as price control items, including one-, two- and three-layer surgical masks with a maximum retail price of RM7-a-box, RM10-a-box or 20 sen each and 80 sen each, respectively.

The retail price for tie-on three-layer surgical masks and N95 masks are 80 sen and RM6 each respectively.

Members of the public who find any shop selling any of these five items above their respective maximum prices can lodge a report with the ministry. Our officers will take immediate action upon receiving such reports," Chong told reporters at the Sarawak Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs office here Thursday (Jan 30).

He said while other types of face masks were not price-controlled, action could still be taken under the Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act against traders who hike the prices unreasonably.

Individuals convicted for offences under the Act can be fined up to RM100,000 or jailed up to three years, while companies can be fined up to RM500,000.

Chong also said the ministry's officers were meeting face mask suppliers on Thursday (Jan 30) to discuss how to increase the supply of masks to meet demand.

He said there were three local manufacturers of face masks, two mainly for export and one supplying government hospitals.

"Because of the sudden surge in demand and panic buying by the public, currently there is a shortage of face masks.

"We are discussing with them how to allocate more of their stock for the local market," he said.

