

Pharmacists unhappy with new face mask price

Published on: Wednesday, April 01, 2020



KOTA KINABALU: Pharmacists in the country have voiced their concern at the fluctuating ceiling price of face masks and voice their disappointment at its sudden lowering to RM1.50 without any prior reasonable notice or consultation with key stakeholders.

In a statement released by the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS) comprising Sabah and Sarawak Pharmaceutical societies, it said the treatment was highly unjust to community pharmacists who have done their national duty and remained open during this crisis to serve the rakyat.

“The government’s announcement on the 21st of March 2020 that the ceiling price of 3-Ply Medical Grade Face Masks was capped at RM2.00 had spurred many pharmacies to initiate orders of face masks.

“However just after 9 days this ceiling price has been revised yet again and this sudden change will cause widespread hardship amongst community pharmacies, importers, wholesalers and manufacturers nationwide,” said MPS Executive Director Lam Kai Kun.

Lam said MPS does believe that the Government is fully aware that the masks cannot be obtained at RM0.80 and hence had increased the price to RM2.

"This decision had at least allowed some masks to be imported/ manufactured and made available for sale to the rakyat."

"We firmly oppose the new price (RM1.50) taking effect on 1 April 2020. It is our request that the government either subsidise the pharmacies that will incur losses or give them a deferment period of 1 month to clear out their stocks. Invoices can be provided with dates of purchase as evidence if required." he said.

Lam said Market analysis and feedback have shown that when the ceiling price was raised to RM2, many community pharmacies placed orders for face masks as the cost price was slightly lower than RM2. Many had paid in full or paid 50 percent of the deposit for stocks which are only due to arrive in April 2020.

"The reduction of the ceiling price to RM1.50 caught community pharmacies by surprise and leaves them no avenue to clear their existing stocks. Despite the removal of import and sales taxes, in states like Sabah and Sarawak the cost is still high due to transportation charges. Therefore, many pharmacies in these states are receiving the face masks at the high price of RM1.90."

"The notice period for the adjustment of ceiling price is unfairly short and we urge the government to announce a longer adjustment period of at least 1 month so that community pharmacies can clear their stocks." he said

"It is important to point out that most community pharmacies do not intend to make much profit from the sales of face masks and keep it in stock as a public service to those in need; and ration the sales carefully to maximise the number of rakyat that can purchase the masks." he said.

Lam said this short notice will cause a new shortage as many community pharmacies will no longer be able to sell the masks. This situation will only benefit black market sales of face masks at higher prices where the ceiling price is difficult to enforce (such as online or by word of mouth).

"KPDNHEP has been vigilant in checking community pharmacies, even when they did not have stock, however we fail to understand why no action is taken on online sellers who sell above ceiling price."

"Community pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare providers to the rakyat and need to be treated as such and protected," he said.

"However, to date, the government and KKM have failed to recognise community pharmacists as front liners in fighting Covid-19."

"Further, community pharmacists have not been identified as health care personnel who will receive the free face masks reserved for front liners and yet many have continued to serve the rakyat despite not having the needful protection." he said.

Lam said they will further appreciate if the government make available the list of potential local and international suppliers who are able to supply below RM 1.50 for 3-ply medical grade masks or assist us to purchase such stocks since many pharmacies are independently owned and do not have the buying power for large volume of stock that has a lower cost price.

<http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/149953/pharmacists-unhappy-with-new-face-mask-price/>