

Pharmacies say govt should subsidise losses in lowering face mask price

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By LOH FOON FONG



KUALA LUMPUR: The government should subsidise the losses suffered by pharmacies from the sudden lowering of price for three-ply face masks from RM2 to RM1.50, or else it should defer the decision for a month, says the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS).

Its president Amrahi Buang said MPS was disappointed that the move was taken without any prior notice or consultation with stakeholders.

"We firmly oppose the new price (RM1.50), which will take effect on April 1.

"We request that the government either subsidise the pharmacies that will incur losses or give them a deferment period of one month to clear out their stocks.

"Invoices can be provided with dates of purchase as evidence if required," he said in a letter dated March 30 addressed to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

The letter was also signed by Sarawak Pharmaceutical Society president Susan Tang and Sabah Pharmaceutical Society president Jemima Ho.

It was also forwarded to Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Alexander Nanta Linggi, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba, National Disaster Management Agency director-general Datuk Mohtar Mohd Abd Rahman and Pharmaceutical Services senior director Datin Faridah Aryani Md. Yusuf.

Amrahi said market analysis and feedback had shown that when the ceiling price was raised to RM2 on March 21, many community pharmacies placed orders for face masks at the cost price, which was slightly lower than RM2.

"Many paid in full or paid 50% of the deposit for stocks which are only due to arrive in April. The reduction of the ceiling price 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 such as Sabah and Sarawak, the cost is still high due to transportation charges. Many pharmacies in these states are receiving the face masks at the high price of RM1.90," he said.

Amrahi said most community pharmacies did not make much profit from the sale of face masks and keep it in stock as a public service.

They also ration the sales carefully to maximise the number of people who can purchase the masks.

Moreover, a result of this short notice will cause a new shortage as many community pharmacies would 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)," he added.

Amrahi said community pharmacists were the most accessible healthcare providers for the people, but the government and Health Ministry have failed to recognise their role as one of the frontliners fighting Covid-19 and giving out free masks.

"We hereby urge the government to take the initiative by instructing government agencies (including Nadma) that all pharmacies be included in their list of allowed purchases of locally-produced face masks.

"In addition, we welcome government assistance in our efforts to provide a stable supply of face masks to the public at a reasonable price," he said.

He added that the government should make available the list of potential local and international suppliers able to supply three-ply, medical-grade face masks at below RM 1.50 or assist them in purchasing such stocks.

"We have advocated before and would like to reiterate that the government should nationalise all face mask manufacturing and supply so that the cost, quality and specification, especially the three-ply medical-grade face masks, can be standardised," he said.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/31/pharmacies-say-govt-should-subsidise-losses-in-lowering-face-mask-price>