

## Face masks now a price-controlled item

Written by 3K Admin

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BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Government will control the retail price of surgical masks sold at exorbitant rates while the Health Ministry vows stricter enforcement against people who fail to wear masks if they have flu-like illnesses.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Government would make the single-ply surgical mask as a price-controlled item indefinitely during the current Influenza A(H1N1) pandemic. He said the item only costs 30 sen each but some people were selling it for RM5 per piece because of the pandemic.

Selling surgical masks at exorbitant prices during a pandemic is like mencekik darah (squeezing blood from customers), he said.

Under the Price Control Act 1946, we can include face mask as a price-controlled item in the context of a health emergency, he told newsmen at the Permatang Pasir by-election nomination centre here yesterday.

Muhyiddin said the ruling would be imposed on producers, distributors and retailers of masks, adding that they should also ensure there were adequate supply of masks.

He said he would direct Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob to have the item gazetted, adding that the necessary licences would be issued to the distributors.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said it is mandatory for those suffering from influenza-like illnesses to wear face mask and if they don't, we would take stern action against them under the Disease Control Act 1988.

We want the people to practise personal hygiene to reduce the spread of the flu, said Liow, who was at the Youth Skills Development Institute here yesterday.

He said two more deaths from the flu were recorded yesterday a seven-month-old baby and a 74-year-old woman, bringing the death toll to 64. There are 4,225 cases reported so far.

To date, we have 284 patients still warded in hospital, of which 33 are in the intensive care unit, including 17 who are from the high-risk group people who are obese or with chronic asthma, diabetes and undergoing post-natal recovery, he added.

Later in Kuala Lumpur, Liow said the Government would declare a national curfew to slow down the spread of Influenza A(H1N1) if the patients' mortality rate exceed 0.4% based on 20 times of the current confirmed cases, according to World Health Organisation guidelines.

He said the current rate was hovering between 0.1% and 0.4%, adding that the Government was treating the situation as a health emergency situation due to persistent community transmissions.

We have taken various steps to ensure the situation can be controlled well, he said after opening the Asia Healthcare Conference 2009 yesterday.

Liow added that a health emergency meant that there was dynamic and persistent community transmissions between 200 and 400 reports of confirmed cases a day.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) has called on pharmacies and other traders to sell surgical masks with minimal profit or at cost price as a national service to fight the spread of Influenza A(H1N1).

The normal price would cost around 50 sen but the price has shot up to RM3 to RM4 each due to great demand, said its secretary-general, Muhammad Shaani Abdullah.

Source: <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/8/18/nation/4537818&sec=nation>