

Ceiling prices set for masks

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Thursday, 20 August 2009 08:48 - Last Updated Thursday, 20 August 2009 08:51

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PUTRAJAYA: The Government has set the ceiling prices for various types of surgical masks, which have been declared price-controlled items, with immediate effect.

Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the prices approved by the Cabinet yesterday would ensure that there was no profiteering by the traders from the influenza A(H1N1) pandemic.

The ceiling price set for each single-ply surgical mask is at 7 sen, 20 sen for two-ply, 80 sen for triple-ply and RM6 for the cup-like N95 types.

Ismail said the prices were set after the Government had made a study on the production cost for masks and had decided that even with the ceiling prices, the retailers and wholesalers would still be able to make some fair profits.

The Government would not have intervened if the traders were ethical and not take advantage of the situation by inflating the prices.

We were forced to take action after receiving reports that some traders were charging up to RM5 for a mask that is usually sold at only 50 sen each,

he told a press conference after chairing his ministry's weekly post-Cabinet meeting here yesterday.

Ismail said the masks would remain controlled items until the Health Ministry announced that the country was free from the A (H1N1) threat.

The ministry's enforcement unit would conduct random checks on the traders and the public can report those who over-charged to the ministry at 1800-886-800 or lodge a complaint with the ministry directly.

Errant traders or suppliers who overcharged could face a fine of up to RM15,000 or a maximum of two years jail or both upon conviction under the Price Control Act 1946.

Meanwhile, a number of pharmacies in Selangor, when contacted, said they have yet to receive a directive from their headquarters on the new price cap for surgical masks.

However, some of them said they were already selling the masks below the regulated prices.

A leading pharmacy was selling the N95 masks at RM4 each and the only item that was selling above the cap was the triple-ply masks at RM1 each.

In some major pharmacy chains, hand sanitisers and masks were sold out within a day.

Source: <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/8/20/nation/4553450&sec=nation>