

Don't hike price of face masks for quick profit, Chong warns businesses amid Wuhan virus outbreak

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Chong (centre) holds up an example of a surgical mask during the press conference. Photo by Chimon Upon

KUCHING: Manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers have been warned not to take advantage of the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak by increasing the price of face masks and hand sanitizer products.

Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Chong Chieng Jen said any business that arbitrarily hiked prices for unreasonable profit would be charged under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act 2011.

He said an individual found guilty under the law faced a fine not exceeding RM100,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years jail for an individual and for a corporation, ia fine not exceeding RM500,000.

“While I am confident that most traders are ethical, I do not discount the fact that there may be some black sheep among them who will do anything for a quick profit. But as we are now caught in a global crisis situation, let us all work together to get out of the crisis,” he told a press conference at the ministry’s office here yesterday.

Chong said there were five types of face masks which have been listed as price control items under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act 2011.

They are:

1. One layer face mask – RM5 per box wholesale price, RM7 per box retail price.
2. Two layer face mask – RM8 per box wholesale, RM10 per box/20 sen per unit retail.
3. Three layer face mask – RM25 per box wholesale, 80 sen per unit retail.
4. Three layer face mask, tied to the head – RM30 per box wholesale, 80 sen per unit retail.
5. N95 – RM100 per box wholesale, RM6 per unit retail.

Members of the public who find any shop selling any of the items above their respective maximum prices can lodge a report to any of the ministry's offices and their enforcement officers would take immediate action upon receiving such reports, Chong said.

"Our 2,300 enforcement officers and 1000 price checkers nationwide will also be carrying out inspection on outlets selling these items," he said.

He said while other types of face masks were not listed in the Price Control items, they were still subject to the same Act, but under a different section of the Act which prohibits profiteering.

Asked if his ministry had received any complaints about traders in Sarawak selling face masks above the control price, he said so far 10 complaints had been received from the public.

He said action had been taken, where the enforcement officers had gone to the ground to check and verify the allegation against the traders.

"But upon checking, the officers found that the shops were selling the items at control price or below the controlled price. This morning, I went to three pharmacies to check the stock and price and all of them are still selling the items at the controlled price or even below the controlled price," he said.

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