

MEF: Mandatory swab tests costly, ineffective and contrary to international best practice

PETALING JAYA: The requirement that all workers in the manufacturing sector in the EMCO areas to undergo mandatory twice weekly swab tests to detect Covid-19 infection in order for the company to be allowed to operate is too costly and contrary to established international best practices.

MEF President Dato' Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman J.P., in response to the latest SOP directive issued by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) for the manufacturers in EMCO areas, said this should not be implemented due to the high cost of conducting the RTK swab tests for all employees twice every week.

“It does not make sense to swab the workers twice every week since most of the manufacturers operate five-day weeks, which would leave only three days a week for business operations,” said Dato' Dr Syed Hussain.

“The high costs of the swab tests are also to be borne by the employers and would be too much for the manufacturers especially in the present very challenging economic situation.

“With the cost of swab test at RM70 each, a manufacturer with 1,000 employees would have to pay RM140,000 to test all employees every week. In four weeks, the cost would be a whopping RM560,000 per month just for swab tests.

“We are also concerned that conducting repeated swab tests on our employees may also increase the risk of injury to the nasal and surrounding tissues and cause further health complications such as getting infected.

“Furthermore, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) updated guidance does not recommend widespread screening of individuals without symptoms (asymptomatic) due to its high costs and ineffectiveness.

“And neither does it make sense to require those already vaccinated to undergo the swab tests.

“We are of the view that such test should not be made as a mandatory condition for manufacturers to continue business operations.”

He said a more effective approach would be to focus on efforts to support the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme at the industries.

“Obviously, some of the SOPs were formulated without the inputs of industry stakeholders as these SOPs are ineffective, unrealistic and does not ensure the survivability of business, but instead does opposite.

“MEF has repeatedly urged the authorities that the SOPs must be formulated with the inputs and feedback of industry stakeholders in order to be effective.

“A more effective strategy would be to focus on the NIP on industries and we propose a special taskforce be set up to carefully manage and monitor this effort, and ideally with the support of the Ministry of Health.”

Dato’ Dr Syed Hussain also raised serious concerns regarding situation of unregistered factories that continue to operate without being subject to any regulations.

“Instead of penalising employers who have complied with all the SOPs and requirements, the authorities should focus on these illegal factories that are abundant in Selangor and the Klang Valley,” he said.

“These illegal factories also utilise illegal foreign workers who are not subject to all the established SOPs and protocols and they must be looked at closely.

“We should not punish the good employers while the illegal factories continue to operate without restrictions and not contributing to the national efforts to eradicate Covid.

“This is the most opportune time to clamp down on the illegal operations and the authorities should take the necessary actions.

“For the employers that had strictly complied with SOPs, we urge the government to allow them to operate without further disruptions.”

For further information, contact the MEF Secretariat at 03-7955-7778 or fax 03-7955-9008 or email mef-hq@mef.org.my.

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