

Clarify self-quarantine guidelines, bosses urge govt

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A waiter taking orders from customers, both wearing face masks, at a restaurant in Melaka on Wednesday. -NSTP/SYAFEEQ AHMAD

As Malaysia prepares to switch from total containment in managing the Covid-19 pandemic to an endemic phase, clear guidelines for self-quarantine are needed to prevent disruption to workplaces and productivity.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said to minimise disputes between employers and employees or trade unions representing workers, it was important for the government to issue clear guidelines on self-quarantine.

He said standard guidelines would be useful to avoid legal implications or disciplinary action against workers because of self-isolation that could later be determined as improper.

Provisions needed to be established to deal with any party that sought to abuse the system, he added.

"MEF will advise members and issue guidelines on matters related to self-quarantine. Employers may also come up with their internal policy to deal with issues related to self-quarantine.

"Issues may arise with Covid-19 close or casual contacts, which may not be determined by medical authorities and be open to abuse, hence causing disruption to productivity."

For self-regulation to be implemented successfully, he said, there was a need for high integrity and trust between employers and employees so that the system would not be abused.

Malaysian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association president Datuk Jawahar Ali Taib Khan, shared a similar view on the matter.

He said engagement with industry players would be a good step before the government decided on the matter.

"We are not experts in this field and, as I said before, the government, especially health experts, should provide guidelines for employees and employers to follow if their workers are affected.

"Maybe the workers could get a PCR test in a government clinic with a letter from the doctor that self-quarantine is needed," he said, adding that the welfare of both employees and employers, who were badly affected by the pandemic, should be protected.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, on Wednesday, said home quarantine would be enforced with full individual responsibility in the endemic phase, expected to begin by the end of next month.

This, he said, would cover people identified as close or casual contacts, under surveillance, suspected and confirmed cases.

The government was also mulling a national testing policy that required people to conduct Covid-19 self-test regularly once the country entered the endemic phase, Khairy reportedly said.

In the United Kingdom, the BBC reported that the NHS app (similar to the MySejahtera app) was reported to be sending alerts, prompting thousands of people to self-isolate and missing work, causing widespread disruption.

The UK government had since allowed exemptions for key workers like those working in food distribution.

Instead, they had to take daily tests, with many test sites set up for them.

The alerts, which were not enforceable by law, had drawn criticism, with industry players complaining of shortages as staff had to undergo quarantine, while some workers said they had lost income by missing shifts.