

Groups call for more effective awareness programme on screening

By TARRENCE TAN

NATION

Friday, 01 Jan 2021

PETALING JAYA: Only 8.5% of foreign workers in targeted areas have been screened for Covid-19 from Dec 1-29, prompting calls for more effective awareness programmes to be carried out by the government.

Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) Malaysia president Datuk Soam Heng Choon said it must be noted that foreign workers were employed in all sectors of the economy and not just construction.

The government must do more to spread awareness on the Covid-19 screening programme for foreign workers, he said.

"If the figures quoted by Socso are correct, that means the government agencies tasked to do communication and awareness on mandatory screening have not been effective and they must do more," he said.

Soam said the government must utilise all supervising agencies to ensure compliance with the Covid-19 foreign workers screening programme.

He also urged the government to bear the costs of foreign workers' Covid-19 screening.

"The government should also standardise testing costs and we will cooperate whatever way we can to fight the pandemic," he said.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said the figures by Socso showed that employers were always prepared to send their respective foreign workers for screening, but claimed that the unavailability of the Covid-19 rapid antigen test kits (RTK-Ag) was a "dampener".

This was despite Socso's statement that it had bought almost one million test kits.

“If the employers send their foreign workers for the tests to clinics that are not using the RTK-Ag supplied by the authorities, then they have to pay for the test kits and the service fee,” said Shamsuddin.

He said employers were ready to support the government’s efforts in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, but said RTK-Ag must be made available at every Socso panel clinic.

He also said employers must be given reasonable time to arrange for the foreign workers to be screened for Covid-19.

“There are about 1.7 million legal foreign workers in the country. Given that the country’s capacity to carry out Covid-19 screening is about 54,000 a day, it would take at least 30 days to complete the first round of Covid-19 screening,” he said.

Shamsuddin stressed that the government must be clear in its policy on Covid-19 screening, as it was very vague as to whether or not there would be periodical Covid-19 screening.

“Covid-19 is recognised as an employment disease and costs related to Covid-19 should be borne by Socso to alleviate the current financial difficulties faced by employers,” he added.