

Sick days cost RM5bil

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PETALING JAYA: Sick workers cost employers an estimated RM5.05bil last year, says the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

This estimate is based on the total cost involved for wages of employees on sick leave, outpatient clinic costs and replacement costs for employees on sick leave based on overtime payment, said MEF president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman (*pic*).

However, he said the number of sick leaves taken by employees during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 had dropped compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

“The number of sick leaves dropped by about 50% and 40% for 2020 and 2021 respectively, compared to the number of sick leaves taken in 2019.

“This is possibly due to the fact that during the movement control order (MCOs) in 2020 and 2021, many employees were staying home so there was no necessity for them to go on sick leave,” he told The Star.

Syed Hussain said sick leave is costly to businesses and will hinder companies from reaching their full potential.

“Employers need to establish policies and educate employees about the consequences of them taking sick leave.

“Employers should also put in place preventive measures such as investing in proper sanitation of the workplace, offering free vaccination and supporting workplace wellness programmes,” he said, adding that some employers provide their workers with recreation facilities and other programmes to encourage wellness.

Syed Hussain also said that while some employers provide clear sick leave policies and communicate them to employees, the consequences for workers who take excessive sick leave should be clearly stated.

For example, he said employees who use more sick days than allotted may be subjected to severe action that may include dismissal.

Some employers may also offer incentives for not taking sick leave, said Syed Hussain.

Such incentives include giving recognition to those with minimum sick leave or rewarding them with a payment that would equal the unused sick days.

“Incentives can be effective to encourage employees not to go on sick leave but what is important is to give employees meaningful ways to be fully engaged with the company,” he said.

Syed Hussain explained that employees who feel recognised and needed were less likely to go on sick leave.

“Encourage transparency at the workplace so that employees feel safe telling supervisors about their problems.

“Once mutual trust and confidence is established, employees will feel free to discuss their matters with their supervisors.

“So when personal problems arise, employees may discuss with their managers and request to be late for work, rather than go on sick leave,” he said.

Syed Hussain warned employees against buying fake medical certificates (MCs), saying that those found to be flouting the law had been severely punished.

“Employers have always viewed fake MCs as a major misconduct and employees found to be submitting fake MCs will normally be dismissed.

“There were also instances where employees’ action of submitting fake MCs were reported to the authorities and some of these cases ended up as criminal cases in court, where the court imposed both fine and imprisonment,” he said.