

Employers struggling with cost of Covid-19 tests for migrant workers



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The Malaysian Employers' Federation says its members are baulking at the cost of having to test their migrant workforce for Covid-19, despite the government making it mandatory. – The Malaysian Insight file pic, January 26, 2021.

COST is proving to be a major concern for employers in testing their migrant workforce for Covid-19, said the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

(Socso) currently only provided test kits, requiring employers to pay the service fee.

“The service fee ranges from RM30 to RM85 per test, and the test needs to be done at least twice.

“There is also the possibility of further tests at different periods,” he told The Malaysian Insight as cases involving workplace clusters continued to increase.

Shamsuddin said that employers are doing their level best to fulfil the requirement for all migrant workers nationwide to undergo mandatory screening.

“It is not that employers are reluctant to send their foreign workers for Covid-19 testing.

“There is some confusion whether the Covid-19 test is really subsidised by Socso as there are also statements from various quarters that employers have to bear the cost,” he said, adding that it was liaising with Socso on this.

Meanwhile, he said the MEF did not keep records on the number of employers that have completed the task of having their foreign workforce tested.

Socso revealed (<https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/291137>) that as of December 27, almost a month after the announcement that it was compulsory for foreign workers to be screened, only 2,385 (4.3%) employers have sent their workers (68,460) for Covid-19 screening.

The enforcement began on January 1 in six high-risk states: Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Sabah, Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, which involved 800,000 foreign workers, whereas the other states are given until the end of February.

Workplaces, either private companies or government agencies, have been tracked as a primary source for Covid-19 infections in Malaysia.

Since January 6, Malaysia recorded a total of 225 new clusters linked to workplaces, contributing 64.3%, among 350 new clusters.

The Ministry of Health said the highest number (<https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/296798>) of workplace clusters is from manufacturing-related companies (80 clusters), followed by the construction-related companies (53 clusters) and then service-related companies (31 clusters).

“This trend will likely persist, even during MCO 2.0, as the major sectors are still open. Focus on workplace safety and workers’ housing will be key,” said infectious disease consultant Dr Christopher Lee on Twitter (https://twitter.com/chriskc_Lee/status/1353124294058930176).

The former deputy director-general of health added that programmes such as preventing outbreak at ignition sites (POIS) by Selangor are helpful.

A concerned citizen, Jimie Cheng also took to Twitter (<https://twitter.com/jimiecheng/status/1352954397773320194>) to share his views on the workplace clusters.

“Positive cluster workplaces should be immediately placed on enhanced movement-control order (EMCO),” he told The Malaysian Insight.

“On-site rapid testing using RTK-antigen kits could yield results on the same day which would allow for re-opening of the particular site.

“Strategically anticipate the next outbreak, using data science combined with contact tracing, and immediately isolate and test.

“It is important to identify workplace clusters correctly and communicate them precisely instead of using vague cluster names.”

The burden to contain these clusters are overwhelmingly on the government as it decides to allow these sectors to operate with full capacity, Cheng said.

The Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) wrote to its members yesterday that 99 (30%) of the 318 active clusters are from the manufacturing sector.

FMM president Soh Thian Lai told members to heighten proactive and preventive measures as the business sector cannot sustain another round of total lockdown.

“Appoint senior management members of the company to oversee that SOPs (standard operating procedures) are strictly adhered to.

“Advocate a ‘safe work bubble’ for employees by monitoring and limiting employers’ movements,” he said.
– January 26, 2021.