

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 6

RUANGAN : NATION

Covid-19: Current situation

(As at 7pm Dec 29, 2020)

Malaysia	New cases	Total cases	Total deaths	Total recovered
1,925	108,615	457 (+2)	86,715 (+1,123)	

 Perlis	 Kedah	 Penang	 Perak	 Selangor	 Kelantan	 Terengganu	 Pahang	 N.Sembilan	 Melaka	 Johor	 Sabah	 Sarawak	 K. Lumpur	 FT Putrajaya	 FT Labuan
0	+8	+57	+17	+747	+31	+2	+288	+60	+9	+110	+230	+4	+360	+2	0
Asean+	Indonesia	Philippines	Japan	Myanmar	China	Singapore	S. Korea	Thailand	Vietnam	Cambodia	Brunei	Laos			
Confirmed cases	727,122	471,526	220,236	122,534	87,003	58,542	58,725	6,440	1,451	364	152	41			
Deaths	21,703	9,162	3,252	2,618	4,634	29	859	61	35	0	3	0			
Recovered	596,783	439,016	184,662	104,351	82,021	58,386	40,703	4,184	1,303	360	149	40			
Global Top 10	US	India	Brazil	Russia	France	UK	Turkey	Italy	Spain	Germany					
Confirmed cases	19,781,718	10,224,797	7,506,890	3,105,037	2,562,646	2,329,730	2,162,775	2,056,277	1,894,072	1,670,194					
Deaths	343,182	148,190	191,641	55,827	63,109	71,109	20,135	72,370	50,122	31,176					
Recovered	11,696,819	9,807,569	6,568,898	2,496,183	190,722	N/A	2,037,433	1,408,686	N/A	1,255,700					

By ALLISON LAI, ASHLEY TANG and RASHVINJEET S. BEDI

Govt urged to set screening fee

Bosses call for some control to ensure affordability and prevent profiteering

PETALING JAYA: With the Covid-19 screening being mandatory for all foreign workers, employers are urging the government to control the service fee imposed by clinics and hospitals for tests.

Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia president Datuk Soam Heng Choon said several months ago, prices of the RTK and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests were cheaper when screening was not mandatory.

"Prices have gone up now that it's mandatory to test all foreign workers. With such a demand, businessmen take the opportunity to increase prices.

"The government should set price control to prevent unnecessary rush or profiteering," he said in an interview.

Soam said RTK that used to cost between RM50 and RM60 several months ago was now priced RM100 to RM120.

There are also calls for the government to absorb the service fee since the Antigen Rapid Test Kit (RTK) is subsidised for foreign workers who contribute to Socso.

Only about 50% employers of foreign workers in construction contribute to Socso as of now, he said, so cost was an important factor because periodic screening for workers should be considered as the mandatory test was only one time.

"Come new year, more employers will register and contribute to Socso for their foreign workers.

"If the government wants to make the test mandatory, then they should control the price and service fee.

"We can let businesses make some profit but don't create unnecessary rush that leads to price increase and shortage. It has to be fair and a balance must be there for all parties," he added.

On Dec 1, Socso reportedly said it would provide RTK test kits for about 900,000 foreign workers, who are contributors to the body, for the Covid-19 screening programme.

It said panel clinics or hospitals registered under the programme were free to determine their service fees.

From Jan 1 this year, it is mandatory for all foreign workers to be covered by the



Mass testing: Medical personnel collecting samples for Covid-19 testing from flat residents in Subang Jaya in October.

Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) under Socso. Employers have to contribute 1.25% based on employees' wages, subject to the threshold of RM4,000 and capped at RM49.40 per month while the foreign workers are not required to contribute to the EIS.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said Socso should standardise and also cover the service fee.

"The cost now varies from one panel to another. Covid-19 is recognised as an employment disease and as such Socso should bear the full cost of prevention and treatment of employees.

"It is critical for Socso to cover all costs related to the virus' prevention and treatment of employees as most employers faced financial difficulties throughout 2020," he said.

Shamsuddin noted that the low number of foreign workers being tested was due to hitches in the supply of the test kits to the panels.

"So far, about 50,000 foreign workers have

been tested for Covid-19, which is 2.9% of the total of 1.7 million foreign workers in the country," he said.

Weighing in, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said the service fee was not fixed and some clinics or hospitals would set the price based on the number of workers that needed to be screened by a particular employer.

"Some employers have opted to get the screening done at the clinic or hospital while the rest preferred to get it done at the factory premises to minimise disruption to operations.

"Since Socso has clarified in April that Covid-19 is recognised as an occupational disease, especially for workers who contracted the virus due to direct exposure at work and in the course of their employment, the government should also cover the service fee," he said, adding that it was important as most businesses were still in the recovery stage.

Based on members' feedback, Soh said the

service fee ranged between RM55 and RM80 per person with some hospitals quoting as high as RM140 to RM180 per person depending on the number of workers to be tested.

The compulsory Covid-19 screening for foreign workers that was first announced for six high-risk states—Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Sabah and the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan—was recently extended to the rest of the country.

On Nov 25, Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said Malaysia would impose mandatory Covid-19 screening for 1.7 million foreign workers.

On Dec 24, he said the National Security Council would enforce the compulsory Covid-19 screening under Act 342 (the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act) beginning Jan 1 so that action could be taken against employers who refused to have their workers tested.

On Dec 21, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M. Saravanan said foreign workers who contributed to Socso could have their subsidised tests carried out at the appointed hospitals or clinics.

For those without coverage, the costs would be borne by their employer.

He said the enforcement on Jan 1 onwards would "only focus on the six states, while employers in the other states would have until the end of February for all their foreign workers to be tested for Covid-19".

In a statement, Socso said it had purchased nearly a million units of RTK with 746 clinics and hospitals involved in the screening tests nationwide.

"As of Sunday, Socso had approved and distributed 273,357 units to clinics and hospitals.

"However, the number of test kits that have been utilised are only 68,460 units," it said, adding that the kits were supplied based on the requests made by clinics and hospitals depending on appointments requested by the employers.

Socso said its data showed only 2,385 employers sent their workers for Covid-19 screening as of Sunday, merely 4.3% of the total companies that employ foreign workers in Malaysia.

Checks show range of prices for RTK antigen test

PETALING JAYA: The service fee for the RTK antigen testing under the Socso scheme ranges anywhere from RM40 to RM100, checks by *The Star* have found.

Various clinics around the country revealed that the fee also depended on the number of people being tested.

One clinic in Sri Kembangan, Selangor, for example, quoted RM60 per test.

If there were more than 100 people being tested onsite, the cost would go down to RM40.

Another clinic in Banting, Selangor, said the service fee would be between RM80 and RM100,

depending on the number of workers being tested.

Similarly in Sabah, most clinics were charging between RM60 and RM100 per person.

"We will also give a special quotation if more people are being tested," one clinic told *The Star*.

For those who are not covered under the Socso scheme, the cost of the test was much higher, with some clinics even quoting prices up to RM200.

The RTK method is done on blood samples but only detects the presence of antibodies to the coronavirus and not the virus itself.

The RT-PCR test, which is more

expensive, is considered to be more accurate than the RTK antigen, although the latter is more suitable for large-scale testing as it produces faster results.

The RT-PCR method detects the presence of Covid-19 in an individual's body by looking at genetic material taken from swabs.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah said as far as he knew, Covid-19 testing prices had reduced.

"In fact, it is lower than prices recommended by doctor associations.

"But maybe there are sporadic

cases where they have increased the price," he added.

Dr Raj said the RT-PCR tests used to be around RM400 to RM450 but was now about RM250, while the RTK antigen testing was now about RM120, down from RM200 to RM250.

Under the Socso scheme, Dr Raj said prices were between RM50 and RM80 depending on the number of people.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy said the fee quoted at between RM40 and RM50 per worker was nominal, taking into consideration the work,

high risk and responsibility in conducting the screenings.

"The MMA has advised all participating general practitioners to charge reasonably for the service.

"This professional fee includes the swab test procedure involving strict compliance with infectious disease prevention and control, PPE as well as administrative and logistical costs.

"Participating practitioners also bear full medico-legal responsibilities in conducting the swab tests and accurately recording and reporting test results while complying with health guidelines," he added.