



Call to make costs for Covid-19 test public

➤ Govt urged to intervene on broad variation of charges applied by private health facilities

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PETALING JAYA: Health experts have urged the government to make the cost of Covid-19 testing transparent as Malaysians deserve to know what they are paying for.

This is especially so with many varying prices from healthcare institutions.

Malaysian Pharmacists Society president Amrahi Buang said transparency is the key to avoid confusion and curb profiteering.

"The prices for Covid-19 testing must be made known to the public. The government

has the authority to execute this, especially now that we are in an Emergency. Once the price has been worked out with the test kit providers, it should be made public," he said.

Health experts *theSun* spoke to yesterday called for a price cap for Covid tests to avoid profiteering, especially with more Malaysians getting tested daily and figures expected to soar to 8,000 daily cases by March.

There are three types of Covid tests currently available for the public.

The first is the Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR), which is recognised by the Health Ministry and

accepted as the international standard for Covid screening.

It has close to a 100% accuracy and results are available within 36 hours.

There is also the Antigen Test (RTK-Ag), which is an alternative to the RT-PCR, where results can be obtained in a shorter time.

The test has an 85% accuracy and results can be available within 24 hours.

The final one is the Antibody Rapid Test Kit to detect a past Covid infection through a blood sample. People can self-test at home and get their results within 15 minutes.

However, Amrahi said he does not recommend the antibody test.

"It is not accurate and results could indicate you are Covid-19 positive even though you are negative."

As to the cost, Amrahi said the testing fees vary among private hospitals.

"There is one hospital which is charging RM295 for the RT-PCR test, where they accept walk-ins. Other hospitals who offer drive-through and walk-in testing charge between RM299 and RM388, while others are known to charge up to RM480," he said.

He pointed out that the price is more expensive for individuals compared to groups and companies.

Malaysian Thoracic Society president Dr Pang Yong Kek, who is a consultant respiratory physician, proposed ceiling prices for the tests to be between RM60 (RTK-Antibody) and RM450 (PCR-Rapid).

"The conventional PCR should be RM250, while the RTK-AG should be RM120."

He also called for the government to consider setting a ceiling price for Covid-19 testing.

"The prices should be revised from time to time to remain relevant. For instance, conventional PCR used to be priced between RM600 and RM800. Nowadays, it could be as low as RM250. These prices can be set by the government after discussing it with the stakeholders," he said.

Employers have also urged the government to control the service fees by hospitals and clinics for tests.

The Real Estate and Housing Developers Association Malaysia pointed out that prices for RTK and PCR tests were cheaper when screening was not mandatory for foreign workers.

Attempts to get comments from the Health Ministry and the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry on the costs of Covid-19 testing were unsuccessful at press time.

