

## MMA: Give clear guidelines for Covid-19 testing of workforce

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By DIYANA PFORDTEN

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has criticised the policy changes for Covid-19 testing of the workforce before businesses resume operations under the conditional movement control order (MCO).

MMA president Dr N. Ganabaskaran said the lack of clear-cut guidelines on the testing of the workforce "has left business owners, employees and even general practitioners in the country confused and frustrated".

He said in a statement on Sunday (May 10) that clinics have been receiving calls from employers to arrange Covid-19 screening for their employees, but were unable to conduct screening without necessary guidelines as the Social Security Organisation (Socso) had also discontinued the use of rapid test kits (RTK) for the mandatory screening of workers for Covid-19.

He said that Socso had previously announced that it would be using the RTK antibody tests for workers through GP clinics on its panel.

"However, we have now been informed that under the Socso screening programme, only the reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) method will be used.

"The public must be aware that test results using this method typically take 24 hours to obtain – and depending on the volume of test samples and other logistics, it may take longer," Dr Ganabaskaran said, noting that RT-PCR test results received after three days would not have any clinical value.

MMA noted that results must be received between 48 to 72 hours after testing or the results may not reflect the current health status of the person tested.

"Currently, testing capacity nationwide in the private sector is around 9,000 per day. It must also be noted that the laboratories testing these samples also test non-Covid-19 cases," he added.

Dr Ganabaskaran said MMA had advised the GPs not to perform antibody RTK tests without clear



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He added that there was further confusion when the when the International Trade and Industry Ministry recently announced that companies could resume business operations from May 4 without an approval letter from Miti and Covid-19 screening of workers is not mandatory.

"Stakeholders are confused now why the screenings were needed at first and no longer needed now. (They are) feeling unsafe knowing that the threat of Covid-19 is still very much around," he said.

He added that the MMA also called on the government to be clear on the screening of foreign workers, in terms of which sectors and health departments will be involved.

"We wish to appeal to the government for more clarity and proper guidelines for the smooth implementation of the standard operating procedures (SOP) as many are in the dark over the next steps to be taken.

"We believe this confusion concerning the testing of workers would not have happened if the announcement to test workers was made after receiving the guidelines from the Health Ministry," he said.

MMA also cautioned the public that Covid-19 tests are merely precautionary measures and not a guarantee against Covid-19 infection.

"Test results that are 'negative' must not in any way give the impression that the person tested is protected from Covid-19 infection," Dr Ganabaskaran said, adding that people could still be infected even after testing negative before.

**TAGS / KEYWORDS:**

**Covid-19 , Coronavirus , Testing , Malaysian Medical Association , MMA , Health Ministry**

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