

MMA shocked at guidelines

NATION 

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By CLARISSA CHUNG

PETALING JAYA: Medical professionals have raised objection to what is seen as “discriminatory policies and practices” against children of medical frontliners in childcare centres.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr N. Ganabaskaran criticised the updated standard operating procedure (SOP) for childcare centres set by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

Appendix 12, Section 2.1.2 of the guidelines states that frontliners’ children “are at high risk of getting the (Covid-19) infection from their parents”.

“The safest place for these children is to be cared for at home. However, if frontliners’ children are to be sent to the childcare centres, they must be segregated from other children,” the guidelines read.

The guidelines were revised on May 22 and circulated by Welfare Department officers.

Dr Ganabaskaran said such guidelines were “unacceptable”.

“The MMA finds it disturbing and is shocked that such a policy had been approved by the ministry concerned and circulated by the Welfare Department,” he said in a statement.

Earlier, a letter written by paediatrician Datuk Dr Amar Singh and signed by about 250 paediatricians shed light on the updated childcare centre guidelines.

Describing the SOP as a “slap in the face” to frontliners, they said the guidelines communicated that the children of frontliners, who were working hard to serve the country, were “contaminated” and “preferably not even welcome” to a childcare centre.

“This ministry should be protecting the rights of all children and their parents, not eroding them and sending a message of non-inclusion and segregation,” they said.

They are calling for the guidelines to be reviewed.

In a reply Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Pina Mohd Harun said



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“I have contacted MOH, and it will explain about the SOP, which is provided through discussions between the ministry, the Social Welfare Department and MOH.

“The SOP will not be issued without the advice and reference from MOH and MKN because this is a matter of security and public health,” she said when met by reporters during her visit to Wisma Bernama in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

She said in the country’s efforts to break the chain of Covid-19 infections, every SOP issued was based on the advice of experts, especially from MOH.

“We appreciate their sacrifices and there’s no discrimination. Social Welfare Department employees are also part of the frontliners.

“However, I welcome any views,” she said as reported by Bernama.

She dismissed claims that the SOP for nurseries was a form of discrimination against children of frontliners.

Separately, in his daily press briefing yesterday, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said the guidelines were meant to give special attention to frontliners’ children, and not to be seen as a form of discrimination.

“There is no discrimination or restriction for them in sending their children to childcare centres. It is not segregation, but to allocate a place for them, that is what we are trying to emphasise,” he said.

The SOP, he added, had yet to be presented to MKN for approval.

He said they were trying to minimise the risk according to guidelines by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr Noor Hisham said there were eight target groups identified by the ministry in efforts to screen and curb Covid-19, one of which was healthcare personnel.

“They are always exposed to viruses. Not just Covid-19 but other viruses as well.

“Those working in hospitals are constantly reminded that when they go home – don’t touch your children straightaway. We have to wash ourselves because we have a higher risk of carrying the virus,” he said.

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