

Additional Foreign Worker Medical Screening Necessary To Protect The Population Against Import Of Communicable Diseases — MMA

By CodeBlue | 30 January 2024

The increase in the prevalence of communicable diseases should not be taken lightly, as it poses a dual threat to both public health and the nation's productivity.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), in response to a press statement issued by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) on January 22, 2024, is of the opinion that the additional screening for filariasis, methamphetamines, and Hepatitis C is necessary amid an increase in communicable diseases and drug abuse detected among foreign workers entering the country.

We applaud the Ministry of Health (MOH) for leaving no stone unturned in its comprehensive medical screening programme for foreign workers.

According to FOMEMA, there were 6,413 cases of tuberculosis, 3,347 cases of Hepatitis B, 960 cases of syphilis, 447 cases of HIV, 22 cases of malaria, and three cases of leprosy detected among foreign workers in the country in 2023.

Additionally, between December 16, 2023 and January 23, 2024, three additional tests detected 215 cases of filariasis, 229 cases of Hepatitis C, and 213 cases of methamphetamine abuse among foreign workers.

Foreign workers receiving a positive test result from any of the screenings performed under the comprehensive medical screening will be certified unsuitable for employment in Malaysia, and the nearest district health office notified via the MOH e-notification system.

We agree with MOH's policy to include three additional screenings, in addition to the initial six, which includes medical examination, chest X-ray, and blood test, in FOMEMA's medical screening programme for foreign workers.

We also urge the Ministry of Human Resources to remind countries supplying workers of their responsibility to ensure that medical screenings are carried out as required before allowing them to depart to Malaysia.

All workers are required to test for tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, syphilis, HIV, malaria, and leprosy in their country of origin before departure to Malaysia.

Workers detected with any communicable disease before departure or upon entry to Malaysia must be isolated for the prescribed period until the next course of action is taken by the authorities.

Despite the requirement for medical screening of workers before departure to Malaysia, we are still seeing workers testing positive for communicable diseases when they arrive here.

This indicates a lack of compliance with the requirements in the processing of applications for work in Malaysia.

The government should consider the suggestion to allow employers to deal directly with manpower suppliers in the various countries for their human resources needs, as there have been numerous issues arising from the involvement of middlemen.

Employers should also be given the freedom to choose their medical provider of choice for the pre-departure medical screening of foreign workers.

The increase in the prevalence of communicable diseases should not be taken lightly, as it poses a dual threat to both public health and the nation's productivity.

We urge the public to support these necessary precautions taken by the MOH, which prioritises the health of the population. Ignoring these safeguards can also result in an increased public health care burden.

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