



MMA supports tighter health screening for foreign workers

MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz says the increase in the prevalence of communicable diseases poses a threat to public health and productivity.

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MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said the additional screenings were necessary amid an increase in communicable diseases and drug abuse among foreign workers.

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has expressed support for the health ministry's decision to include three additional tests in the medical screening for foreign workers.

In a statement, MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said that the additional screenings for filariasis, hepatitis C and methamphetamine use were necessary amid an increase in communicable diseases and drug abuse detected among foreign workers entering the country.

She stressed that 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 agree with the health ministry's policy to include three additional screenings, aside from the initial six... in Fomema's medical screening programme for foreign workers," she said, referring to the Foreign Workers Medical Examination Monitoring Agency Sdn Bhd.

"We also urge the human resources ministry to remind countries supplying workers of their responsibility to ensure medical screenings are carried out on foreign workers before allowing them to depart to Malaysia."

Azizan said that despite the requirement for foreign workers to undergo medical screenings before leaving for Malaysia, there were still some who tested positive for communicable diseases when they arrived in the country.

She said this indicated a lack of compliance with the requirements in the processing of applications for work in Malaysia, adding that the government should consider the suggestion to allow employers to deal directly with manpower suppliers in the various countries due to the "numerous issues arising from the involvement of middle men".

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

Her statement was in response to concerns by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) over recent unannounced changes in the fees and frequency of medical examinations required for migrant workers.

FMM said it was disappointed that Fomema and the health ministry did not consult with stakeholders before implementing the policy changes. FMM also said the 14% to 15% fee increase would cost employers RM124.2 million annually for 600,000 workers.

Fomema previously required foreign workers to have check-ups annually for three years and then every seven years. However, effective Dec 16 last year, the workers must have annual medical examinations.

The fees have also increased to RM207 for men and RM217 for women, and the new tests include those for filariasis, hepatitis C and methamphetamine use, in addition to HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, pregnancy, opiates and cannabis.

Foreign workers will be deemed unsuitable for employment in Malaysia if they receive a positive test result from any of the screenings.