

# FACE MASK: ADEQUATE CAPACITY TO MEET SOARING FACE MASK DEMAND, ASSURE MANUFACTURERS

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AHEAD of the mandatory requirement for Malaysians to wear face masks effective Aug 1, manufacturers and industry leaders remain confident that they would be able to meet an anticipated soaring demand.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said the industry has adequate capacity, while some companies have built up stocks.

“There are companies that have expressed interest to venture into face mask manufacturing. So, there should be no issue of insufficient supply,” he told *Bernama*.

The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry last week told the Dewan Rakyat that there was sufficient supply of face masks, based on its monitoring and surveillance on production and distribution and supported by import.

Top Glove Corporation Bhd, for example, has three machines which are already fully operational with a total capacity of 8.8 million pieces of face mask per month.

Its executive chairman Tan Sri Lim Wee Chai said the world’s largest glove maker started producing face masks in June and manufacturing mainly for internal consumption.

“To ensure our internal supply of raw materials is sufficient, we source from several suppliers. We also have enough land and space for capacity expansion,” he said.

Nevertheless, he said there could be a shortage arising from urgent buying at the initial stage of the

directive for the public to wear face masks in crowded public places and public transport.

Senior Minister (Security Cluster) Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the ruling was made following the increase in positive COVID-19 cases and lower compliance to standard operating procedures among the public.

“If this happens, it will be temporary and for the immediate term only.

“With e-commerce, face masks are widely available online and countries such as China will have sufficient supply to cater to any surge in demand,” Lim said, adding that the government was also limiting the export of face masks.

On product accreditation from the Medical Device Authority Malaysia, in accordance with the Medical Device Act, he said it takes time particularly for new manufacturers to register with the body as this requires ISO 13485 certification.

“It is important to bear in mind that in addition to wearing a face mask, there is a need to also ensure the masks are worn correctly and disposed of safely, and to continue practising social distancing as well as washing hands frequently and properly,” he said.

Last month, experts from the Association of Malaysian Medical Industries and Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society suggested that face masks available in the market should be properly graded and meet the necessary standards to provide protection from COVID-19.

In terms of offering protection from COVID-19, Lim explained that face mask performance is mainly determined by Bacterial Filtration Efficiency (BFE) and Sub-micron Particulate Filtration Efficiency (PFE); the higher the BFE and PFE, the better its performance.

“BFE and PFE for Top Glove’s face masks (Top Mask) is above 95 per cent,” he said.

He cautioned that some face masks may have a high degree of BFE and PFE but do not meet the medical grade standard as they are unable to comply with other parameters such as differential pressure, flammability or splash resistance test.

“We recommend that Malaysia considers developing a standard set of requirements for face masks to ensure consistently good product quality and performance, and setting up more accredited face mask testing facilities,” he said.