



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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CAP: Are Covid-19 self-test kits serving their purpose?

People have called in to the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) expressing concern that saliva test and nasal swab methods for Covid-19 using self-test kits are providing contradicting results. According to them, the nasal swab they did showed that they were Covid-19 positive while the saliva test indicated otherwise (false negative).

They tested themselves because they have family members who were Covid-19 positive with symptoms while some others who conducted the test have symptoms, yet in both cases, the test results showed that they obtained a false negative when doing the saliva test.

Their concern is that if the self-test kit is less sensitive by producing false negatives, people might think that their symptoms are non-Covid related and might not undergo self-quarantine, thereby spreading the virus in the community. The other concern is that asymptomatic persons whose self-test results gave false negatives may also not observe self-quarantine.

The government's passing the onus on the people to conduct their own self-testing does not effectively isolate infected people from the community and at the same time, depending on self-reporting to the Health Ministry (MoH) allows great discrepancies in statistics collection.

We would like to know if the self-test kits are not sensitive then why is MoH asking people to conduct their own testing?

People who need to have social contacts in the course of their work have been buying and testing themselves on a regular basis. Perhaps MoH needs to convince them that they have not been doing it in vain. If the saliva test is not as sensitive as that of a nose swab, then why must people acquire saliva test kits if it is not serving the intended purpose?

We are also worried that new strains of the virus can be brought into the country when the borders are open if such test kits are not sensitive enough to positively identify infected travellers and prevent them from entering the country.

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