

Vaccination the answer

THE rabies outbreak in Penang, Perlis and Kedah has caused anguish, heartbreak and fear to animal-loving Malaysians especially pet owners, animal rescuers and animal shelters.

Malaysia has been rabies-free since 1999, and this outbreak caught the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) and all animal carers unprepared, resulting in a very low stock of rabies vaccines for animals and a frantic desire to cull all stray dogs in Penang.

While the DVS has done an admirable job in containing rabies in these three states by enforcing mass dog vaccination and culling of affected community stray dogs, it's important to note that all mammals are potential vector carriers.

SPCA Selangor understands the significance of such actions and urge the DVS to exercise the most humane and sustainable method to eliminate this disease.

In stray communities where the disease is very unlikely to spread,

SPCA urges immediate vaccination instead of indiscriminate culling.

Indiscriminate culling promotes dog movement as other strays will move in to fill the vacuum, since we can't catch all strays.

Granted, affected areas may necessitate culling but mass vaccinations will create herd immunity that will become a wall of immunity, and over a given time frame rabies will be eliminated.

Expert organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) espouse that effective and verifiable control of the disease through national mass dog vaccinations, targeting at least 70% of the dog population, will break the cycle of transmission of the virus from dogs to humans.

Effective and humane stray animal control, education and public awareness by the Government is highly recommended.

Penang is 350km from Kuala Lumpur and it is highly unlikely that affected strays will make their

way to KL.

While Selangor is not in the affected area, we are anxiously awaiting the DVS protocols and guidelines for animal shelters.

Based on on-going evolution of this outbreak in the northern states, SPCA Selangor will now and again modify our response to ensure human and animal welfare.

SPCA urges the citizens of Selangor not to panic and instead take preventive, proactive and precautionary measures.

We will be vaccinating all of our animals in residence and our staff who come in contact with animals. We advise all animal rescuers to be vaccinated against rabies as well.

SPCA also hopes to procure additional doses of rabies vaccines from our suppliers and provide them at a reasonable cost to the public.

As the situation is fluid, we will continue to monitor this outbreak and will always ensure that the welfare of our staff and our resi-

dent animals will not be compromised.

At the same time, we will continue to help the stray population by continuing our spay/neuter clinic (Klinik Kembiri) and to educate and guide the residents of the state on dog bite prevention.

SPCA Selangor hopes that rescuers and pet owners in the affected states will not worsen the situation by bringing strays or their pets to other states, as the movement of animals can spread the disease quickly.

Instead, it would be advisable to confine, monitor and vaccinate the strays that the rescuers are caring for to protect them.

Pet owners are also advised to keep their pets within their compounds and prevent them from coming in contact with other pets/strays for the time being.

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