

Rabies alert as outbreak spreads from Perlis to Kedah and Penang

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TAIPING: The Veterinary Services Department has declared a rabies outbreak in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

Its deputy director-general Datuk Dr Quaza Nizamuddin Hassan Nizam said stray dogs caught in the three states had been found to be positive for the zoonotic virus.

"We initially detected the first case in Perlis on Aug 19 before the next case was detected in Penang on Sept 8.

"Since then, 732 stray dogs have been culled in Perlis and Kedah," he said, adding that of the 82 biopsies conducted on the culled dogs in both states, 25 tested positive for rabies.

He said the department had also recorded 29 dog bite cases in the three states.

Dr Quaza advised dog owners to keep their pets at home as the disease is spread through dog bite.

Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek said 200 Veterinary

Department personnel have been sent to the three states to contain the rabies outbreak.

In **George Town**, a 44-year-old teacher and a 11-year-old pupil bitten by stray dogs in separate incidents had tested positive for rabies but have since been treated and discharged.

The teacher was bitten by a stray last Tuesday in Pokok Sena, Seberang Prai Utara on the mainland while the boy was hurt in a separate incident on Monday in Taman Nelayan, Kuala Sungai Pinang on the island.

State executive councillor in charge of health Dr Afif Bahardin said the Health and Veterinary Departments had been put on high alert following the incidents.

"We have two confirmed positive rabies cases since Monday.

"The public have to be extra cautious as the saliva from sick dogs could transmit the disease to humans through contact, so people should stay away from strays at all

times," he said here yesterday.

Dr Afif said initial investigations showed that the disease had spread from Perlis.

State Health Department director Datuk Dr Zailan Adnan said the teacher and pupil had recovered after being bitten.

She said the duo had minor scratches from the bites and had been discharged from the hospitals.

"They have gone back to their daily routine without any sickness. Rabies cannot be transmitted through human-to-human contact.

"The incubation period for rabies is between one week and a year," Dr Zailan said.

State Veterinary Department director Dr Siti Salmiyah Tahir said strays spotted in rabies-infected areas would be put to sleep by its enforcement unit.

"Dogs that show signs of rabies must be quarantined and the owners must chain them up. It is an offence to let sick dogs wander in their neighbourhood."

Rabies

- Rabies is a contagious and fatal viral disease spread through bites or scratches and also saliva of infected animals.
- Dogs are main source of the vast majority of human rabies deaths.
- Rabies is a vaccine-preventable viral disease which occurs in more than 150 countries and territories.
- Rabies elimination is feasible by vaccination of dogs.
- Immediate wound cleansing with soap and water after contact with a suspect rabid animal can be life-saving.
- 40 per cent of people who are bitten by rabid animals are children under the age of 15.
- Rabies infection causes tens of thousands of deaths every year, mostly in Asia and Africa.