

MALAY MAIL 24/9/15

Outbreak may be contained in three weeks

By S. Aruldas
and Mohamed Basyir
mmnews@mmail.com.my

BUKIT MERTAJAM — The Veterinary Services Department is confident the rabies outbreak in Penang, Kedah and Perlis will be contained in two to three weeks.

Its deputy director-general, Dr Kamarudin Md Isa, said a good indication was the drop in the number of dog bite cases.

"There have been no new cases reported in Perlis and Kedah as the situation stabilises," he said.

Although the department currently has 300 doses of the rabies vaccine, more is on the way.

"By the end of the month, we will have 1,700 doses and we have also ordered 50,000 doses from France that will arrive on Oct 8," he said.

Dr Kamarudin said the government had sought the help of more than 150 private veterinary doctors to provide vaccination with a service fee of RM10 a dog.

As of Monday, he said, 68 cases of dog bites were recorded, with 42 confirmed cases of rabies.

The authorities had culled 2,190 stray dogs in the three states since the outbreak started about a week ago.

Dog owners have been advised to minimise their pets' interaction with stray dogs to prevent the outbreak from spreading.

In **Balik Pulau**, Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya said only three dog bite cases had been reported in Penang but none of the victims were infected with the virus.

"As a safety precaution, they were given antibody vaccines," he said.

"Sufficient vaccines were distributed to hospitals in Penang, and the people can be assured that the medical team in the hospitals will be prepared."

Dr Hilmi said the virus could also spread if the dogs carrying the virus bit other animals, not only humans.

He declined to comment on the method used to cull stray dogs but said he understood public sentiments against it.

"The action by the Veterinary Department to cull stray dogs was in the people's interest. I would suggest the NGOs protesting against the culling to talk with the council and the Veterinary Department to come up with an amicable solution," he said.

On Monday, an international NGO, World Veterinary Services, had offered the state government 50,000 free doses of vaccine to vaccinate stray dogs, instead of culling them.