

PRIME NEWS

Penang to get more anti-rabies vaccine

SHORTAGE: 300 doses from other states expected to run out this week

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THE Penang Veterinary Department hopes to get some 5,000 doses of rabies vaccine next week.

Its director, Dr Siti Salmiyah Tahir, said a new shipment was ordered by the state government as a contingency plan due to a vaccine shortage in the state.

She said the 300 doses of vaccine received from other states in two batches on Wednesday (170) and yesterday (130) was expected to run out within the week.

"Many pet owners have been coming to the veterinary department for the vaccines, and we have been giving out about 150 doses a day.

"In fact, we had 15 people at our department last night after the first batch arrived.

"We expect more to come today," she said when contacted by the *New*

Straits Times yesterday.

It was reported that Penang has been put on rabies alert after three outbreaks — two in Balik Pulau and one in Pokok Sena — over the last week.

Last Wednesday it was announced that stray dogs in the state would be culled to contain the disease.

The announcement drew public outcry among local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as "Save our Strays" and international NGOs such as "Mission Rabies".

Many people took to social media to condemn the state government's action. The NGOs and the public had asked the state government to stop culling and start vaccinating. However, the state government had remained adamant on its stand and repeatedly stated that it was merely acting on the advice of experts from Health Ministry and the Veterinary Department.

Dr Siti Salmiyah explained that a shortage of vaccines in the state was primarily due to the fact that the state had no storage of it.

"This outbreak is sudden. We were previously a rabies-free state, so we did not keep any vaccines in storage. However the other states that were not completely free of rabies had maintained a storage of the vac-

cines," Dr Siti Salmiyah said.

She said 10 new dog bite cases were reported on Wednesday, bringing the total number of such cases to 51.

When asked if there was an increase in dog bite cases, she said it was hard to say conclusively as the increase could be due to awareness.

"People, including private hospitals and clinics, are now reporting dog bite cases because of the rabies alert. Previously people did not report such cases," she said, adding that to date, some 300 dogs had been culled since Sept 16 and that the culling operation was ongoing.

Meanwhile, State Health Committee chairman Dr Afif Bhardin said even though the state government was willing to come up with the funding for buying vaccines, it would have to be through the Veterinary Department and the ministry.

He said the Veterinary Department would get the vaccine from the suppliers, but currently, the suppliers were unable to meet such a high demand, as they had been supplying vaccines to other states.

"We have placed an order, so it will come," he said when met at Pantai Hospital where a victim of a dog bite, D. Mangleswari, 28, was being treated.



Dog bite victim **D. Mangleswari** is receiving treatment at Pantai Hospital in Penang. Pic by Mikail Ong