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Mass vaccination of dogs

> Programme in Penang to be flagship for controlling rabies in the region

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GEORGE TOWN: British animal charity Worldwide Veterinary Service (WVS) is able to rapidly deploy 40,000 rabies vaccination doses once approval is obtained for a mass vaccination drive.

WVS CEO Dr Luke Gamble said the vaccines were sponsored and estimated the cost to be about RM2.704 million.

He said the target was to vaccinate 70% of the dog population in Penang which is estimated to number some 50,000 pets and strays.

"Vaccination process will take about three to six months," he said in a press conference yesterday with Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

Also present was Putrajaya Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) senior chief assistant director Dr Rozanah Asmah Abd Samad and Penang DVS director Dr Siti Salmiyah Tahir.

Perlis, Kedah and Penang are presently engaged in culling dogs following a rabies outbreak but this had drawn criticism from animal welfare groups.

Gamble said the programme will be a flagship to control rabies in the region and will be developed to exceed World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines.

He said dogs vaccinated will be marked while follow-up teams will also be deployed to survey the vaccinated and non-vaccinated dog population.

"The markers are non-toxic and all activities will be data logged," he said.

On bringing in the vaccines, Rozanah said the DVS will be trying to expedite the process, noting that the normal procedure to evaluate vaccines take about three months.

"Since this is an emergency, we will try to see if it can be done in at least a month," she said adding that evaluation was important for biosecurity and to ensure no new viruses are introduced into Malaysia.

Lim meanwhile said his administration was very interested in the alternative proposed by WVS but stressed the culling will continue in the interest of public health.