

Playing it safe with H5N1 virus

Even tyres of vehicles are being disinfected at exit points in Kelantan

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KOTA BARU: Wet gunny sacks soaked in lime have been placed at all exit points in Kelantan to disinfect tyres in a move to prevent the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus from spreading through vehicles crossing over to neighbouring states and to Thailand.

State Agriculture Committee chairman Datuk Che Abdullah Mat said although no new cases were recorded in the last 72 hours, they had to remain vigilant.

"We have even placed the lime-soaked gunny sacks across all routes located within a kilometre from the affected Kampung Pulau Tebu," he said.

Che Abdullah said so far five samples taken from infected kampung chickens from the village in Tunjung tested positive for the H5N1 virus. The authorities have culled 227 animals including chickens, ducks and birds in the affected zone.

"Samples taken from other localities tested negative. The commercial poultry farms in the state are free from the infection.

"Although the cases are isolated to only one village so far, we must continue taking precautionary measures in view of the threat to public health," he said, adding that surveillance activities were carried out within a

10km radius from Kampung Pulau Tebu.

Che Abdullah said a special task force comprising the Veterinary Services Department, police, Health Ministry, State Economic Planning Unit and Rela had been set up.

"We have also requested the police to set up roadblocks to stop people from moving birds within 1km of the affected areas.

"We also told villagers in the affected zone that they are not allowed to rear chickens for at least two months," said Che Abdullah.

He also confirmed that the human population staying within 300m of the affected village tested negative for the virus.

Veterinary Services Department director-general Datuk Dr Kamarudin bin Md Isa also confirmed that only Kampung Pulau Tebu was affected by H5N1.

Samples were sent to the Veterinary Research Institute in Ipoh after 57% of 26 chickens were reported dead in the village.

Besides the 227 animals culled, 253 eggs were also destroyed.

Another 225 samples were taken from avians within the area of surveillance.

"We confirm that the outbreak is under control, and no commercial poultry farm is affected. Poultry in the market is safe for consumption," said Dr Kamarudin.

"The Health Ministry had also conducted checks in the affected zone, and found no humans were infected."