

HYGIENE

Let's declare war on rats, leptospirosis, says Lam Thye

KUALA LUMPUR: The authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), traders and public should declare war on rats to curb the increase of leptospirosis cases.

National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye yesterday said leptospirosis cases had increased annually since the disease was gazetted under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases, 1988 (Act 342) in December 2010.

He said statistics from the

Health Ministry showed that in 2012, there were 3,665 cases.

He said the figure increased to 4,457 cases in 2013, 7,806 (2014), 8,291 (2015) and 5,285 last year.

He said the number of deaths associated with leptospirosis was 48 in 2012, 71 (2013), 92 (2014), 78 (2015) and 52 last year.

"In 2015, data showed that 66 per cent of leptospirosis cases, or 5,455 victims, were male, while 34 per cent, or 2,836 victims, were female. Most of the victims (47 per cent) were aged between 25 and 55."

The ministry said the infections were related to the type of job and task performed by the victims. It said those involved in the agricultural sector, waste management, farm animals and pet grooming operators, rescue work, and recreational activities, as well as those with chronic diseases and open-skin wounds were in the high-risk group.

"Should anyone experience fever, headache or muscle pain within two weeks after a trip to any recreational area, they must seek treatment in a clinic or hos-

pital. Inform the doctor that you have been to a recreational area or involved in recreational activities," Lee said.

He said factors like an unhygienic environment also contributed to the increase in rodents and leptospirosis cases.

He said relevant departments, agencies, NGOs and society should ensure cleanliness of the environment, adding that hawker sites, drains and back lanes were infested with rats due to discarded food and rubbish.

He said rat urine could exist in

bodies of water, adding that people who swam or played in these contaminated waters would be exposed to bacterial infections.

"I suggest that local authorities adopt measures to get rid of rats in areas under their jurisdiction, including cleaning up garbage disposal areas regularly."

He also suggested health departments of local authorities hold education campaigns, and for food shop and stall operators and owners to keep their premises clean to prevent an increase in rats.