

# Experts: Don't panic over rabies stories

## Authorities doing well by containing its spread in the country, says vet

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**PETALING JAYA:** When unverified horror stories about rabies send people into a panic, cool heads must prevail.

Veterinarian Dr Natasha Lee said there was no urgent need for people living outside rabies-infected areas to vaccinate their pets against the disease.

This was because there have not been any cases of rabies reported outside of Serian, Sarawak, and Kuala Sepetang, Perak, she said.

"There's no need for now to worry about an outbreak happening in other areas of Malaysia.

"The authorities in Sarawak are

containing the situation in Serian by vaccinating as many animals as possible and educating the public about the disease.

"There has also only been one rabies incident in Perak. The authorities are doing what they can to contain the disease there," she added.

Dr Lee, who is also an animal welfare consultant, urged the public to stay calm, especially those blaming strays for the spread of the disease.

"People should refrain from taking their own action.

"Don't take it out on the strays," she said when contacted yesterday.

Sharing Dr Lee's sentiment was Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Selangor chairman Christine Chin, who advised the pub-

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Dr Natasha Lee

lic against panicking over unverified stories of rabies creeping into their dwellings.

"It is not an outbreak," Chin said of the isolated incident in Kuala Sepetang.

Referring to a social-media post claiming that dogs were being shot

and killed in Kuala Selangor, Chin said there was no need to resort to such measures unless the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) declared the area as rabies-infected.

"Everybody is worried but it (the incident in Perak) is not an outbreak. There is no need to be overly anxious about catching stray dogs in Selangor.

"Culling should only be carried out as a practical measure, and based on evidence of a rabies outbreak," Chin explained.

Chin warned that the unauthorised culling of animals would violate Section 30 of the Animal Welfare Act 2015.

Under the Act, offenders can be fined between RM20,000 and

RM100,000 or jailed up to three years or both.

Former DVS director-general Tan Sri Ahmad Mustaffa Babjee said Peninsular Malaysia is technically rabies-free.

He added that the remote occurrences were due to unforeseen circumstances after a gap of a few years.

"We would be free of rabies for 10 years and then there would be one reported case.

"Sometimes free for five, or two years, and then a case would emerge," he said.

A DVS spokesman said that while the spate of rabies cases in Sarawak could be defined as an "outbreak", the case in Perak was just an isolated incident.