

# KERATAN AKHBAR

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Reports by LOH POOYI FOR THE STAR

## WHO expert: Surge in cases is alarming

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The spike in dengue cases reported mostly in the Western Pacific and Asian region is alarming, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

WHO Western Pacific coordinator Dr Rabindra Abeyesinghe said the countries needed to create more awareness on the disease and enhance patient management.

"People need to be informed of what they need to do and protect themselves," he said in a telephone interview with *The Star* yesterday.

The entomologist and dengue expert, who is based in Manila, said that a big dengue outbreak occurs once every four to six years but the rain aggravated the situation.

"This year, it started with the rain

and it dragged on, and we see a surge in cases," said Dr Rabindra.

He also said that with more clinicians and diagnostics, countries were better at detecting more dengue cases.

"Moreover, populations have grown and there is more vulnerability," he added.

Asked if climate change has a role

to play, he said that it was difficult to make a direct link.

"Broadly, there is a connection, but we cannot point to it," he said.

Asked about the link to an increase in temperatures, he said theoretically, it could cause an increase in dengue cases but experts had not seen an increase in temperatures in recent years.

“People need to be informed of what they need to do and protect themselves.”

Dr Rabindra Abeyesinghe

## Dengue cases at an all time high

Most countries in Western Pacific and Asian regions also seeing an increase

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Dengue fever cases in Malaysia reached an all time high, hitting nearly 80,000 cases and 113 deaths reported from January until Aug 3.

Deputy Health Minister Lee Boon Chye expects the number to hit 150,000 cases by year end if all our efforts are not taken to keep it under control.

The last highest number of cases recorded was in 2015 which recorded 120,836 cases with 336 deaths.

The figures between January and Aug 3 is almost double that of last year's figures for the same period - 42,496 cases with 70 deaths.

There were 251 hotspots in nine states and most of the hotspots were flats and apartments.

The nine are Selangor, Federal Territories, Johor, Kelantan, Sabah, Penang, Sarawak, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang.

Dr Lee said the ministry was using various methods to overcome the dengue outbreak in the country, such as fogging and removing mosquito breeding sites.

A new method, the release of *Aedes* mosquitoes infected with the Wolbachia bacteria to bring down the population of the mosquitoes, was still being monitored, he said.

He said dengue vaccine was used in the Philippines but it was withdrawn after it led to higher mortality rate.

The ministry is monitoring the dengue situation continuously and received weekly reports on the number of cases.

With each district health office nationwide monitoring the situation, once dengue cases are reported, measures such as fogging are immediately implemented, he said.

When there is a hotspot, the health office also organised a gotong royong with local residents via COMBI (social mobilisation and communications) or local council, he added.

He reminded the public to play their role in ensuring their areas are free of *Aedes* mosquitoes.

"Dengue is increasing in many parts of the world even in Singapore. Cuba eradicated it once but it has re-emerged. Southern China, southern Taiwan and southern Japan also have reported cases."

"As air travel becomes common, the virus spreads," he said.

Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said that since June, the trend of weekly dengue cases has increased and reached 3,557 cases a week but there was a slight decrease in the first week of August.

About 70% to 80% of the dengue cases occurred in urban areas, he said.

World Health Organisation report on Dengue Situation (Update Number 572 dated July 4) showed that Malaysia was not the only country which experienced an increase in dengue cases as neighbouring countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and China had it too, he said.

"The major contributing factor is poor environmental cleanliness."

"Abundant man-made containers provide places for *Aedes* mosquito to breed and increase the spread of the dengue virus," he said, adding that littering contributed to the problem.

The change in serotype called "serotype shift" also triggered the dengue surge.

"It has been observed that dengue cases will increase usually four to six months after a serotype shift due to the lack of immunity in the community towards the new serotype."

"From our surveillance monitoring, there was a shift of dengue serology from dengue virus strain (DENV) 3 to DENV 2 in June last year. "Theoretically, DEN 2 is associated with more severe manifestation and high fatality rate," he said.

From January to Aug 3, less than 1% (295 cases) of severe dengue (dengue haemorrhagic fever) cases nationwide were reported.

"There is no specific treatment for dengue or severe dengue, but early detection and prompt medical care will save lives," he said.

Dr Noor Hisham said the changing rainy and hot seasons resulting in stagnant water collected, people movement and increase in population density in urban areas also facilitated the spread.

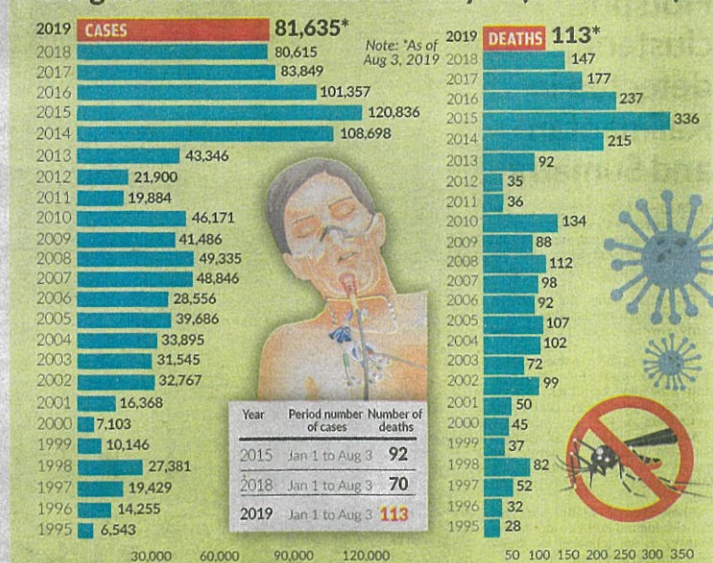
Studies also showed an association between the occurrence of dengue cases and outbreak with the temperature, rainfall and humidity, he said.

two weather conditions. The first is an increase in temperature and the second is an increase in rainfall.

"Of the two, it is the correlation with a temperature rise that is higher," he said.

Prof Aziz said the big rise in dengue cases at the present time is

### Dengue cases and deaths in Malaysia (1995-2019)



### Dengue fever symptoms



### Prevention



## 'Warm and wet weather causing dengue spike'

**PETALING JAYA:** Very warm or wet weather leads to a spike in the number of mosquitoes, including *Aedes* which causes dengue fever.

Universiti Malaya climate expert Prof Datuk Azizan Abu Samah said a surge in dengue cases can be triggered by these

likely due to the current hot spell.

This is because hot weather makes mosquitoes more active and causes them to pass through their life cycle, from egg to larva and to maturity, at a faster pace.

Prof Aziz said the higher temperatures could also explain why dengue cases are also increasing in

other countries.

The Philippines on Thursday declared a national epidemic of dengue fever for the first time since 2000, with more than 600 people succumbing to dengue so far this year.

Singapore is also facing a peak dengue season with 9,135 cases as

of Aug 2, about five times more than the total number of cases last year, *The Straits Times* reported on Monday.

In Vietnam, the number of dengue cases this year has hit nearly 90,000, more than three times the figure recorded last year, Xinhua reported.

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