

More than a bad cough

More lives lost to tuberculosis than dengue in Selangor

By GRACE CHEN
gracechen@thestar.com.my

THE death rate for tuberculosis (TB) was nine times more than dengue in Selangor last year, based on statistics from the Selangor Health Department.

It showed 367 out of 5,071 patients in Selangor died from the disease in 2018.

From January to June this year, an estimated 152 out of 1,929 TB cases were reportedly fatal.

In comparison, deaths from dengue in 2018 were recorded at 41 cases and an estimated 30 cases from January to June this year.

Last year, the districts of Petaling, Gombak, Hulu Langat and Klang were identified as having the highest number of TB cases in Selangor.

Who is at risk

On their Facebook page this January, Health Ministry (MOH) named prisoners and residents of drug rehabilitation centres as vulnerable to tuberculosis. Those in close contact with the patient, senior citizens and healthcare workers are also susceptible.

"The disease is spread by air. It thrives when the immune system is weakened, where there is malnourishment, crowded living conditions and in places that do not receive enough sunlight, which can kill the bacteria," said Selangor Health Department deputy director for public health Dr B. Venugopalan.

The infection rate for the disease, which usually attacks the lungs and can damage all parts of the body except the nails and hair, stands at a ratio of one to 10.

This means for every one TB carrier, 10 people can be infected.

"The longer you wait to receive treatment, the greater the chances of it infecting others as the germs are spread through coughing.

"To ensure that the disease is caught early, a cough that has gone unresolved for two weeks must be checked," said Dr Venugopalan.

Seeking treatment

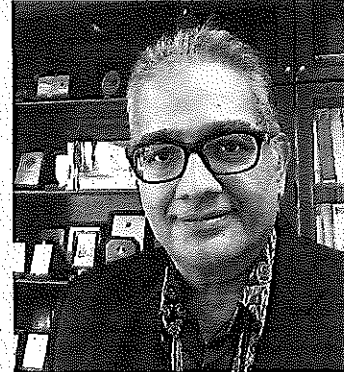
Testing and treatment for the disease is free at all government clinics.

Diagnosis is done via a sputum smear test and chest X-ray.

Those who refuse treatment will be committing an offence under the Prevention And



Dr Mas Ahmad says the department is improving sensitivity of clinics to consider TB as possible factor in lung infection cases.



Dr Venugopalan says TB is airborne and thrives when the immune system is weak.

Control Of Infectious Diseases Act 1988, which can see them imprisoned for no longer than five years or fined not more than RM1,000 or both.

A patient can also be incarcerated in a treatment centre for eight months under this Act.

"We have effective drugs. If a patient comes in early, he can be cured with no residual pathology," said Dr Venugopalan.

However, the real danger is when a patient defaults on treatment, which follows a six-month antibiotic course.

"Some patients do not continue with treatment once they start feeling better. This is when the disease becomes drug resistant and ends up being harder to treat.

"At this stage, the patient is only partially treated thus he can spread the bacteria to others," he explained.

Underlying stigma is another reason why sufferers shy away from seeking treatment.

According to health professionals, there is fear among the people of being ostracised as public perception of the disease is that it only affects HIV patients, drug users and the poor.

Dr Venugopalan also noted that 75% of patients earned less than RM1,000 a month.

"This is the group that is most susceptible to the causes that enable the disease to thrive," he added.

Moving forward, Selangor Health Depart-



Dr Annabella says 85% of TB patients are Malaysians.

ment tuberculosis and leprosy unit public health physician Dr Mas Ahmad Sherzkawee Mohd Yusoff said it was improving sensitivity of clinics and reception staff to factor in TB as possible causes when it came to dealing with lung infections.

He said screenings were being actively carried out as well for families, relatives and close associates of patients to be tested for the disease as latent carriers.

PERAK

MBI pledges focus on rubbish, roads, drains and grass

By IVAN LOH
ivanloh@thestar.com.my

RUBBISH, drains, roads and grass.

These four basic issues are what Ipoh City Council (MBI) has assured ratepayers that it would focus on addressing in the remaining part of this year.

New Ipoh mayor Datuk Ahmad Suaidi Abdil Rahim said the four issues were the main complaints from city folk when he met the people following his appointment as Datuk Bandar in July.

"Wherever I go and speak to the people, they always bring these issues up.

"I will ensure that these will be given priority this year," he said in his speech during a gathering of former MBI staff at Gunung Lang Recreational Park.

"I am also open to opinions on how to handle these problems," he said, adding that he would also seek advice from former mayors on these issues.

Among other plans that Ahmad Suaidi would work on included implementing a smart city project, sustainable development and turning Ipoh into a low-carbon city.

"I hope the smart city project can be implemented within 15 to 20 years.

"We are now in the midst of preparing the blueprint and policies for it.

"My team has also discussed about making Ipoh a low-carbon city," he added.

The smart city project is a collaboration between Town and Country Planning Department (PLANMalaysia), PLANMalaysia Perak and Ipoh City Council.



Using the Malaysia Smart Urban Development 2018-2025 framework, the project is a solution to address issues and curb problems such as transportation and housing facilities.

On the MBI gathering at Gunung Lang