

Anti-dengue campaign intensified

Health Ministry sets up special task force

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry has directed all district health departments to set up a special task force and intensify fogging activities to kill *Aedes* mosquitoes to combat the dengue fever and chikungunya outbreak.

Minister Datuk Liow Tiong Lai said they would launch an all-out campaign against the *Aedes* mosquito early next week.

So far, 12 people have died and the number of cases from Jan 1 to Jan 23 has doubled to 4,221 compared with 2,153 for the same period last year.

"We have to take drastic action to stop the spread of dengue fever and we will be carrying out this campaign on a big scale. The people's involvement is important.

"Dengue has become an epidemic. It is very dangerous as it can cause death," he said when met at the MCA Chinese New Year open house celebrations at Wisma MCA here on Monday.

Liow urged the public to take extra precautions, especially when it rains as it would increase the breeding of the *Aedes* mosquitoes.

"Although we are in the festive season, we still need to be alert as the dengue problem is widespread. If you think you have dengue but you are not sure, just go and see the doctor immediately," he said.

He said Malaysians should do their part by making sure their homes were *Aedes*-free by checking for potential breeding grounds and holding *gotong royong* regularly to keep the neighbourhood clean.

Liow said he had instructed health director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican to give weekly media briefings on the latest dengue situation.

Yesterday at the Penang state MCA Chinese New Year open house held at the Penang Golf Resort, Liow said of the 4,221 cases, 277 were in Penang. The state now has the third highest number of dengue cases after Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

He said private medical practitioners have been told to give priority to treat dengue and chikungunya cases and refer them to the nearest government hospitals.