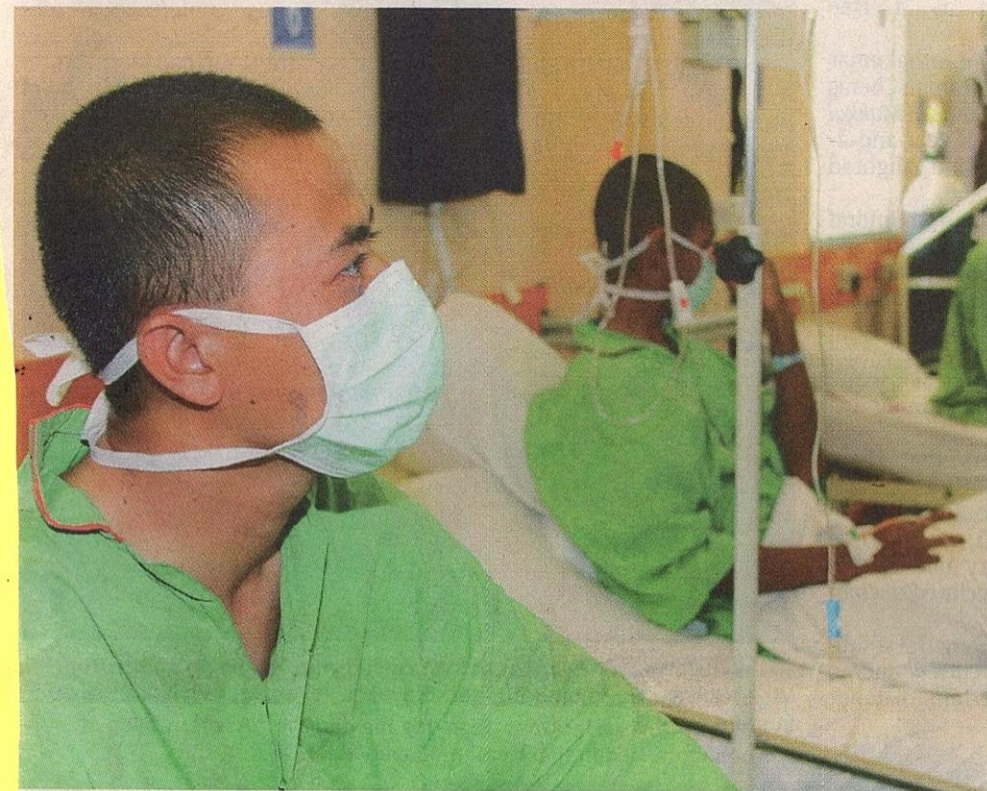


434 under quarantine

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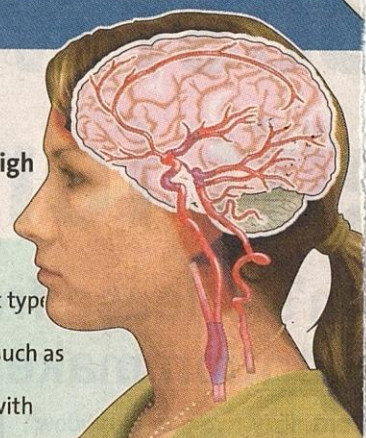
Training at academy put on hold, too



Taking no chances: Trainee Mohd Ghaffry 24, was one of the 10 trainees warded at the Malacca Hospital's isolation ward following the suspected meningitis outbreak at the Road Transport Department's Training Academy at Tiang Dua early this week.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is the swelling of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. It can kill in hours. It is usually caused by bacteria or virus, and occasionally due to fungal infections. Children under five are at high risk because their immune system is not fully developed.



1 Types of meningitis

Bacterial meningitis is more serious as at least 50 different types of bacteria can cause meningitis.

Viral meningitis is usually relatively mild, with symptoms such as headache, fever and general ill-feeling.

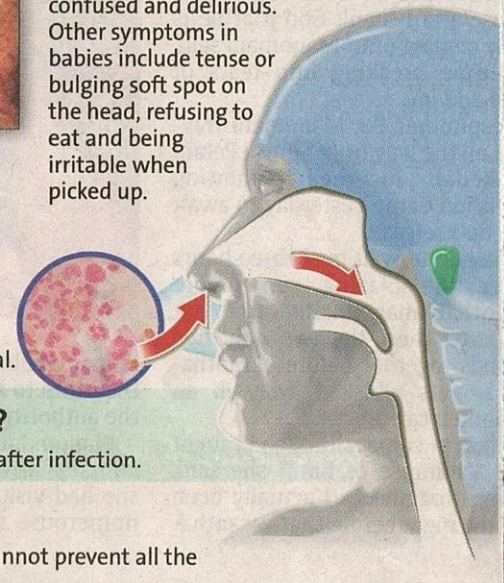
Fungal meningitis is quite rare and mainly affects people with immune deficiencies.



2 What are the symptoms?

Fever, vomiting, severe headache, stiff neck, photophobia and phonophobia (dislike of bright light and loud noises), feeling drowsy, difficulty in waking up, rashes, feeling confused and delirious.

Other symptoms in babies include tense or bulging soft spot on the head, refusing to eat and being irritable when picked up.



3 How do people get it?

The bacteria enters the body through the nose and throat.

4 Is it fatal?

Bacterial meningitis, particularly meningococcal meningitis, is potentially fatal.

5 Is there an incubation period?

Symptoms normally appear about five days after infection.

6 Prevention

There are vaccines for meningitis but they cannot prevent all the different forms of the disease.

MALACCA: The Road Transport Department's Tiang Dua training academy turned into a temporary home for 354 trainees and 80 officers who are quarantined here, following a suspected meningitis outbreak.

This was an increase from the initial 85 trainees quarantined as of Friday.

All training at the academy have been put on hold and would only resume after getting the Health Ministry's green light, said department director-general Datuk Solah Mat Hassan.

Also put on hold is the fresh intake of 215 trainees who were scheduled to begin their course on May 18.

A weekly review would be carried out, Solah told reporters after visiting several trainees at the Malacca Hospital.

Three RTD trainees were warded in the intensive care unit, with another 10 treated at

the isolation ward.

The suspected bacterial meningitis outbreak was detected on May 7 when nine trainees were referred to the hospital here after they complained of fever, cough, headaches and joint pains.

On May 4, trainee Mohd Hafiz Zainudin, 24, from Kota Baru, Kelantan, succumbed to the infection while being rushed to the hospital here.

Another trainee from Penang was warded at the Bukit Mertajam Hospital when he returned home for the Labour Day break.

The academy has set up a special operations room and a direct line at 06-269 2666 for family members to get the latest information.

"The situation is under control," said Solah.

"There is no need to panic. I am aware parents are worried, so we have also set up a

special meeting area at the academy's entrance so that they can meet their children."

He said visits would be limited only to close family members, and under strict supervision of the health authorities.

The trainees are at the academy for a three-month assistant enforcement officer's training course that began on March 8. They graduate on June 1.

In Kuala Lumpur, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said the Health Ministry was alerted about the cases to control any spread.

"At the same time, we also informed the parents about the latest development of their children," he told reporters after opening the fourth Malaysia Calligraphy Exhibition at Wisma Kebudayaan SGM yesterday.

Ong expressed his condolences over the death of Mohd Hafiz.