

# Leptospirosis claims another victim in Kedah

**ALOR STAR:** A 17-year-old boy has become the second person to die of leptospirosis in Kedah this month.

Kedah health director Dr Marzuki Md Isa said the teenager died on Saturday at Sultanah Bahiyah Hospital.

He is believed to have gone for a dip in the Puncak Janing recreation area in Kuala Nerang with four friends on July 16.

"His friends do not have symptoms of the disease," Dr Marzuki told Bernama, but they were also given treatment because the symptoms could emerge even after 15 days following contact with the bacteria.

"Some cases even take up to three weeks to be detected."

The first death from the disease in the state occurred early this month when an employee of the Penang Health Department died at Bukit Mertajam Hospital in Penang after a dip at the Lata Bayu picnic site in Baling, Kedah.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Health Ministry said it was coming out with an awareness campaign to stem the rise in leptospirosis infections.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said there was a need to curb rat infestation and increase awareness of the infection, caused by a bacteria commonly found in rat urine.

"We have to get rid of these rodents once and for all," he said yesterday.

The ministry was considering enlisting the

help of the Federal Territories and Urban Well-being Ministry, City Hall and other local governments to identify high-risk areas and assist in the awareness campaign.

"We are planning to distribute leaflets and posters to warn the public of the disease and to highlight the importance of cleanliness," he said.

Last year, 1,418 cases of leptospirosis infections were reported compared with 263 in 2004. The number of deaths caused by the infection has increased three-fold from 20 to 62 over the same period.

Liow said the increased number of cases was due to bad garbage disposal practices and poor hygiene which allowed rats and other pests to breed, encouraging the spread of infection.

He advised the public to take better care of the environment by disposing their garbage properly, especially near rivers and streams.

"Those who are going on picnics or camping should take care not to dispose food near water sources which will encourage rats and other animals to breed near the area."

Liow, however, said the public should not be alarmed as the infection could be treated by antibiotics, especially in the early stages.

He said leptospirosis was unlikely to develop into an epidemic such as dengue or H1N1, as the disease was simply caused by bacteria and was not transmitted from human to human.