

Tuberculosis situation 'is not alarming'

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TREATMENT IMPORTANT Those with HIV and AIDS also contribute to the rising number of TB cases

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The Health Ministry attributes the increase in tuberculosis (TB) cases in the last three years to the influx of illegal migrant workers.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the department had taken steps to monitor illegal workers.

However, he said, the situation was not alarming and was under control.

TB cases had risen from 18,102 in 2009 to 19,337 last year. As of September this year,

parts of the body.

Liow said the ministry had been working closely with TB associations to bring down the number of cases.

He said patients must undergo a six-month treatment to completely recover from the disease.

This, he said, was to ensure that TB patients did not infect others as the disease was transmitted via vapour and airborne particles.

He said patients were treated under the World Health Organisation's treatment for TB known as DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment Short) course.

"We do not have a drug-resistant problem here, so we are not worried about TB be-

"But we are worried about those who think they have already recovered and do not complete the six-month treatment"



People visiting tuberculosis patients must take precautions, such as wearing face masks, to ensure they do not get infected.

the figure stood at 14,791.

"The disease is still under control," he said, adding that TB was a communicable disease that could be brought under control.

TB is caused by various strains of mycobacteria. TB usually attacks the lungs but can also affect other

treatment."
**Datuk Seri Liow
 Tiong Lai,**
health minister

untreatable.

"But we are worried about those who think they have already recovered and do not complete the six-month treatment."

Besides the influx of illegal migrant workers, another factor is the increase in the number of AIDS patients, because when the body's

immune system is low, TB could creep in easily.

Malaysian Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis (MAPTB) president Datuk Seri Yeop Jr Yeop Adlan agreed that those with AIDS had contributed to the increase in TB cases.

He said foreign workers who were confirmed with TB should be treated or sent back to their coun-

tries of origin. Yeop said the most common TB symptom was continuous coughing for more than two weeks.

He said other symptoms were bloody phlegm, night sweats, fever for three weeks, poor appetite, weight loss and chest pain.

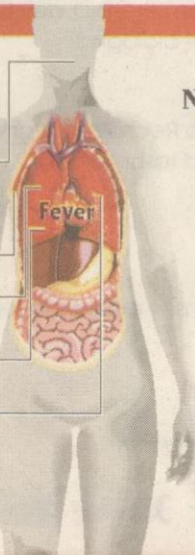
He added that it was important for a patient to undergo the DOTS course for at least six months until

he was totally cured. He also said MAPTB regularly organised seminars on TB prevention at its 15 branches nationwide.

According to an officer with the Foreign Workers Medical Screening Expert or Fomema, employers whose foreign workers were diagnosed with TB were advised to send their workers back to their home countries as soon as possible.

Symptoms of Tuberculosis

- Poor appetite
- Night sweats
- Chest pain
- Productive cough
- Dry cough
- Cough with increasing mucus
- Coughing up blood



INFOGRAPHIC: NST

Number of cases in the country



Cases	Locals	Foreigners
2009	18,102	2,265
2010	19,337	2,541
2011 (until Sept 30)	14,791	2,002

Vaccination the 'best prevention method'

JOHOR BARU The resurgence of tuberculosis (TB) in the last 10 years has prompted the authorities to be on a constant watch for the contagious disease.

In Johor, there has been a steady increase of cases: there were 44.3 per 100,000 people in 2000 and 58.7 per 100,000 people last year who had symptoms related to TB or pulmonary tuberculosis.

The spike in TB cases was enough for the authorities to push the alert button, said state deputy Health director Dr Fatimah Othman.

She said despite medical technology, it was difficult to effectively contain TB since it might take months or years for the disease to manifest itself once a person was infected.

Dr Fatimah said the awareness campaign was mostly carried out among the relatives of the patient.

"It is a concern and most cases involved adults aged 20 and above. In Johor, 90 per cent of the patients are locals."

Arresting the disease was not easy as the initial symptoms, such as pro-

longed fever, coughing, loss of appetite and lethargy, could be mistaken for other ailments.

"At one time, the superstitious would blame the black magic practice of *santau* for the bloody sputum," said Dr Fatimah.

Vaccination through BCG injections at birth and at 12 years old was currently the best prevention method, she said.

"The injection is given free of charge and the government has covered everyone in the target group," she added.