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Pooling resources to fight dengue

Local councils take part in new task force to tackle situation in Petaling district

THE Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ), Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) and Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) will be involved in the newly formed Petaling District Dengue task force set up by the Selangor government.

MBSA is banking on pooled resources from the task force to reduce the number of cases in its locality.

MBSA Environmental Health director Dr Roslan Fadzil said the task force was formed by the state exco during their meeting late last year.

"We believe the task force will help reduce the number of cases this year. This will in turn reduce the statistics for Selangor," he added.

The Petaling District is one of the highest contributors to the statistics, making Selangor the state with the largest number of dengue cases.

Shah Alam recorded 793 dengue cases for the first three weeks of January. Last year, a total of 9,731 was recorded.

Dr Roslan said the numbers were encouraging at this point but it could increase depending on weather conditions.

He said there was usually a spike during the rainy season when it becomes hard to control breeding of *Aedes* mosquitoes.

Shah Alam mayor Datuk Ahmad Zaharin Mohd Saad said the council would concentrate more on enforcement efforts this year.

"We will continue to organise *gotong-royong* sessions as well as search-and-destroy activities but our main focus would be enforcement," he added.

Ahmad Zaharin said the major setback they faced when dealing with dengue was the laid-back attitude of the people.

He urged the community to change this and ensure they live in a clean and healthy environment.

In the meantime, MPSJ recorded 8,611 dengue cases in 2014, with 8,255 cases verified positive.

This is a significant jump from the more than 2,500 cases in 2013 and 669 cases reported in 2012.

This year, 543 dengue cases have been reported to-date and 37 dengue hotspots have been identified.



Biological agent: Toxo mosquitoes (pic) consume other mosquito larvae, such as *Aedes*, at the larval stage. — filepic

To prevent and reduce the number of dengue cases, the council carries out fogging and larvaciding exercises, awareness campaigns, search-and-destroy activities on *Aedes* mosquito breeding grounds and the use of *Toxorhynchites* (*Toxo*) mosquitoes as a biological agent. Abate is also distributed during *gotong-royong* sessions.

MPSJ is the only local council to actively release *Toxo* mosquitoes under the Communication for Behavioural Impact (Combi) programme since 2011.

Also known as elephant mosquitoes, they consume other mosquito larvae, such as *Aedes*, at the larval stage.

It will also eat its own larvae if there are no other mosquito larvae available.

Adult *Toxo* mosquitoes feed on

plant nectar and not blood, making them harmless to humans.

The *Toxo* mosquitoes were released in Kampung Sri Aman in 2011 and Sri Tanjung Apartments, Puchong on May 13, 2013.

In view of the upcoming Chinese New Year, MPSJ president Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan reminded residents who would be leaving for their hometowns to ensure that their premises did not become potential *Aedes* mosquito breeding grounds.

MBPJ Environmental Health director Dr Chitradavi Vadivellu said the council had recorded more than 850 cases between Jan 1 and Jan 27 this year.

"On average, our department registers about 30 to 40 cases a day," said Dr Chitradavi.

She said this year the council

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— DATUK AHMAD ZAHARIN MOHD SAAD

would enlist the assistance of students and construction site workers to search and destroy *Aedes* mosquito breeding sites.

"We have two teams this year, one to go about the normal fogging and spraying larvacide. This is usually done at the direction of the district health office," she explained.

Another will move through public areas, ranging from schools and commercial areas to construction sites to look for mosquito breeding grounds.

The council is also ramping up its ongoing resident-participatory programmes and expanding its own Combi-team efforts in public areas.

One reason Dr Chitradavi cited as a possibility for the number of dengue cases, especially in the PJU city sections, was the high population densities in those areas.

"A lot of the residential areas there are high-rises and densely packed together," she explained.

Anti-dengue efforts will go to waste if public apathy continues

THE *tidak-apa* attitude is contributing to the high number of dengue cases in SS2, Petaling Jaya with plastic cups, wrappers and polystyrene containers littering the roadsides, drains and even parks.

A water chestnut trader, known only as Meng Meng who trades from a pushcart here, blamed it on the irresponsible behaviour of the public.

"The Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) or the health authorities can continue to have anti-dengue programmes but if people's behaviour do not change, then all this would be a waste of time and money," he said.

Consultant engineer Ong Wei Xiong, 27, who works in SS2, also blamed it on the public's bad habits.

"Most people just dump food containers in the SS2 commercial hub.

"Because of the rainy season,

water collects and they become potential breeding sites.

"This careless attitude is contributing to the rise in dengue cases," he said.

A. Dickson, 23, said dengue was on the rise because of people's bad attitude of discarding all kinds of disposable containers in public places.

"Once they fill with rainwater, mosquitoes start to breed.

"Political will is needed to overcome this irresponsible act of littering.

"MBPJ must be vigilant in enforcing its anti-litter regulations," said Dickson, who sells cut fruits from a van.

He also said a major *gotong-royong* was needed to clean the drains in SS2.

The *Aedes aegypti* female mosquito is the main vector that transmits the virus that causes dengue.

Petaling Jaya has seen 829 cases from Jan 1 to 27 and 33 hotspots



Irresponsible: Bags of rubbish discarded instead of being thrown into the bin. This can become a breeding site for mosquitoes as cleaning contractors pick up garbage from only bins. — Photo by ONG SOON HIN

have been identified, including SS2.

Corporate trainer Mohd Syazwan Mustapha, 24, who lives

in Shah Alam, agreed that SS2 needed a clean-up.

"There is too much litter around the commercial hub," he said.