

Malaysian baby infected by polio virus from Philippines



A view of the housing area in Tuaran in East Malaysian state of Sabah, where the three-year-old child who contracted the polio virus, was staying. -NSTP/Khairull Azry Bidin.

KUALA LUMPUR: The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) have confirmed that the type of polio virus contracted by a 3-month-old baby boy in the East Malaysian state of Sabah, is the same virus that is spreading in southern Philippines.

This was announced in a joint statement on December 11, 2019 after a lab test showed that the polio virus was traced to the Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) syndrome that was similar to polio outbreak cases in the Philippines.

Malaysia's WHO representative, Dr Ying-Ru Lo, said the polio case in Sabah was a cause for concern.

"WHO is ready to support the Malaysian Health Ministry in responding to this outbreak and in ensuring children in Malaysia receive the full protection of polio vaccines."

Malaysia's Unicef representative, Marriane Clark-Hattingh, said priority must be shifted to stop the virus transmission before the outbreak became worse.

“Every child, regardless of their economic status or origin, should be protected against this terrible disease,” she said, adding that the only effective way to protect them was through vaccination.

The joint statement said: “The Sabah polio case is genetically linked to the ongoing poliovirus circulation in the southern Philippines, which declared an outbreak of polio on 19 September 2019.

“WHO and Unicef have been providing technical advice on the outbreak response, on-the-ground monitoring and support for risk communication.”

The agencies urged parents and caregivers to ensure children under age 5 were vaccinated as children were most at risk of the deadly disease.

“Polio vaccines are extremely safe and effective, and have resulted in reducing cases of polio globally by over 99 per cent.

“Polio vaccines must be administered multiple times to stop the outbreaks,” the statement said.

On Oct 26, the 3-month-old baby developed fever and paralysis, which was later confirmed to be due to poliovirus following lab tests conducted by WHO’s Regional Polio Reference Laboratory in Melbourne, Australia, on Dec 6.

Malaysia’s last polio case was in 1992 before it was declared polio-free in 2000 together with other Western Pacific region countries. – **nst.com.my, December 11, 2019**