

Polio case reported in Malaysia – first in 27 years



Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah



A polio case has been confirmed in Malaysia, the first in 27 years.

The Health Ministry confirmed that a three-month-old Malaysian boy from Tuaran, in East Malaysian state of Sabah had been admitted into a hospital's Intensive Care Unit after experiencing fever and weakness of limbs.

Health Director-General Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah said the last polio case in Malaysia occurred in 1992, and in 2000, the country was declared as being polio-free. In the recent case, the child was confirmed to be infected with the vaccine-derived poliovirus type 1 (VDPV1) on Dec 6 this year.

"The patient is currently undergoing treatment in an isolation ward and is in stable condition but needs respiratory support," he said in a statement Sunday (Dec 8). He added that the VDPV1 is classified as a circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) type 1. "The cVDPV originates from a poliovirus that has been weakened by the orally-administered polio vaccine.

"Those who have been vaccinated will be protected from infection. The weakened virus has been excreted from the body through the faeces. However, in unsanitary environments, the virus can infect others who have not been immunised against polio and will thus spread in communities whose polio immunisation rates are less than 95%. The longer the virus spreads in the community, it will undergo genetic mutation until it once again becomes an active virus," he said.

Dr Noor Hisham said test results showed that the virus has genetic links to the polio virus that was detected in a recent outbreak in the Philippines.

The Philippines in September this year declared an outbreak of polio, caused by VDPV1.

He added that up until Dec 5, investigations at the vicinity of the polio-infected child's residence found that 23 out of 199 people aged between two months until 15 years there have not received the polio vaccine.

"This is a frustrating situation because the circulation of a cVDPV can only end with a polio immunisation. "After explaining the importance of polio immunisation, the parents of the children have agreed to have them vaccinated," he said.

He added that surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) – a clinical syndrome which is characterised by weakness of the muscles of respiration and swallowing – will be conducted in the area.

"As of Dec 5, 2019 as many as 646 people have been checked and symptoms of AFP have not been detected. To ensure that the polio virus does not continue to spread in Malaysia and infect those who

are not immunised, vaccination activities will be continued in the area of this case and will be expanded to other risk areas," he said.

"The success in eradicating the disease previously was due to prevention efforts through the polio vaccination which was introduced in the National Immunisation Programme in 1972.

Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a potentially deadly infectious disease caused by the poliovirus, and can cause paralysis by invading a person's brain and spinal cord. The disease has no cure and can only be prevented through vaccination. **—thestar.com.my, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, December 8, 2019.**
