

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 4

RUANGAN : NATION

## Experts: Victims exposed to a host of health problems

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**PETALING JAYA:** Health experts have cautioned the people that floods also come with a heightened risk of water and mosquito-borne diseases, of which some could be fatal.

Public health advocate Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said respiratory infections such as flu, cough, upper respiratory tract infection, skin diseases such as scabies, gastrointestinal illness and dysentery were some of the conditions that could develop due to the floods.

He said health officials at flood relief centres should conduct screening and monitoring to detect any potential outbreaks.

"Preventive measures such as strict hygiene, proper food handling, avoiding overcrowding, clean toilets, frequent washing of hands

and good ventilation (must be practised)," he said.

Former deputy health minister Dr Lee Boon Chye said food poisoning, cholera and typhoid were some of the diseases that could be induced by the floods.

"Leptospirosis can also spread during floods due to direct contact with contaminated water, in addition to Covid-19 because of the crowd at the relief centres," he said when contacted.

"Dengue usually is not an immediate problem but may occur after the floods when the Aedes mosquitoes start to hatch due to stagnant water post-flood disaster."

Dr Lee added that the risk from these diseases could be significant if no preventive measures were taken.

"These water borne diseases are potentially fatal," he said.

He said precautionary measures such as providing victims at relief

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Dr Lee Boon Chye

centres with clean bottled water for drinking and cooking should be carried out by the authorities.

"Make sure the food supply for flood victims conforms to safety standards," he said.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia health economics and public health

specialist Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh also expressed her concerns about the effects of the floods on the state of mind of flood victims.

She said the loss of assets due to the disaster could also cause stress and anxiety for the victims.

"From the physical aspect, (there is a risk of) people getting electrocuted and injured due to stepping on sharp objects and even drowning. Such cases have occurred (previously)," she said.

Prof Sharifa Ezat said victims with existing health conditions and displaced by the floods might miss their appointments for medical check-ups due to changes in schedules and residence, and losses of assets.

"Children may miss vaccinations follow-up and mothers may not be able to obtain antenatal, postnatal or other vaccines for their newborns," she said.

She said the government should

also continue to provide financial support to affected victims.

Apart from that, she said the government should work with developers and local councils to prevent the recurrence of floods.

"As of now, it looks like flooding keeps recurring at the same place. What is the government's long-term strategy in handling this?" Sharifa Ezat asked.

She also said the community could not be blamed entirely for littering as the issue was also linked to poor drainage and development planning.

On Sunday, Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the ministry would monitor cases of water borne diseases following the floods, especially leptospirosis and food poisoning.

"We will mobilise teams for clean-up works, particularly at health facilities affected by the floods," she said.