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Mahathir-Coxsackie

MAHATHIR: BE ALERT AGAINST COXSACKIE B

By: Mokhtar Hussain

ISTANBUL, June 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised the people to be alert against contracting Coxsackie B virus which had claimed the lives of 25 children in Sarawak since it was detected in Sibu on April 14.

He, however, said the situation had not worsened to the extent of closing schools temporarily to curb the spread of the disease as suggested by certain groups.

"We have not ascertain the cause of the disease as it is a rare illness and is not widespread," he told a news conference, here.

Dr Mahathir is in Turkey to attend the inaugural summit of heads of government of the group of eight Islamic Developing Countries (D-8) here which groups Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

He urged the people to take appropriate measures to avoid being exposed to the virus as the cause of the epidemic was not clear.

"We must be alert by avoiding places prone to the virus," he added.

In KUALA LUMPUR, the Health Ministry confirmed last week that the disease which attacked children in Sarawak was Coxsackie B virus.

Two experts from Atlanta-based Centre of Disease Control and Prevention were now in Sarawak to determine the strain of virus which caused the deadly disease.

The virus attacked children aged between one and seven. The symptoms are high fever, breathing difficulties and vomiting.

As of midnight yesterday, 91 children were admitted at government hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia on suspicion of contracting the disease, an increase of 15 the day before.

Twenty-four are still being treated at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital while the other 27 at various hospitals nationwide.

In Sarawak, 422 children were warded at government hospitals but 311 were not affected with the virus while 111 are still being treated.

The Health Ministry had advised parents not to take their children aged below seven to crowded public places besides ensuring personal hygiene when preparing food and drinks. -- BERNAMA

HAK/HJ TS