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More checks to ensure water is safe to drink (HL)

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ROMPIN, Sun. - As the acute water shortage continues, the Health Ministry has ordered the relevant parties to increase daily tests on water supply to quell a possible outbreak of contagious diseases.

The tests are to prevent the outbreak of diseases like cholera and typhoid, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today.

The Selangor Waterworks Department, Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd - the company awarded the water supply privatisation scheme in the Klang Valley - and the ministry's engineering division have been ordered to monitor the tests.

"We want to ensure that water supply to consumers is clean and safe for consumption," he said after visiting the district health centre here.

Chua said water at treatment plants, along the distribution network and in tankers must be tested to ensure there was adequate chlorine - the agent that kills micro-organisms that cause contagious diseases.

There had been reports that the ammonia level in the rivers which supplied water to treatment plants was higher than usual due to pollution from factories and houses located on river banks.

"Ammonia is not harmful to health," he said, "but if the level is too high, it will absorb the chlorine and reduce the capacity of chlorine to kill the micro-organisms."

Chua said Selangor Waterworks Department and Puncak Niaga would ensure there was adequate chlorine in the water at their treatment plants.

In a related development, he said the ministry had yet to receive reports that operations of government hospitals in the Klang Valley were affected by the water shortage.

"But we have reminded all State Governments that hospitals should be given priority in the event of any water cut.

"We know that hospitals must always have a high standard of cleanliness as the immunity system of patients is weak and they are easily exposed to infection."

Meanwhile, at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim gave an assurance that water - sourced from lakes and ponds - produced by ultrasource plants was safe.

"Samples have been tested and the results showed the water is safe," he said after welcoming Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who returned from London.

Asked whether those responsible for the water shortage should be held accountable, he said: "Let's settle the problem first."

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