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Chua-Pigs

MILITARY AND POLICE TO HELP TACKLE JE OUTBREAK

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- Police and the military have been called to help deal with the Japanese encephalitis (JE) outbreak and they will destroy some 64,000 pigs in three areas in Negeri Sembilan by Sunday, the national JE task force announced today.

Task force chief and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said 1,400 security forces personnel were expected to start work tomorrow using light arms and they would be assisted by veterinarians.

The three areas involved are Bukit Pelandok, Kampung Sawah and Sungai Nipah, Chua told a press conference after chairing the task force's first meeting here today.

The task force, formed by the Cabinet yesterday, also comprises Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh and representatives from the Defence, Home and Information ministries.

Chua said owners of the 64,000 pigs voluntarily chose destruction of their livestock. The three affected areas have about 300,000 pigs.

He said police and Rela (people's volunteer corps) personnel would also set up road blocks in and around the areas to prevent any movement of pigs outside the cordon.

"The top priority now is to bring the JE outbreak down," he said.

Thirty-one people have died so far in the most recent outbreak while 47 others were still being warded in various hospitals.

Chua said fogging and larvaciding would also be intensified in the three areas concerned using fire and rescue service helicopters as well as land mobile teams to annihilate Culex mosquitoes which transmit the JE virus to humans.

Elaborating on the destruction exercise, he said adequate measures were being taken to ensure the safety and security of those involved and residents.

He said the pigs would be buried in the vicinity and a cleaning operation would be conducted to ensure the areas were disinfected before the farmers and residents would be allowed to move in again.

He also said 30,000 doses of vaccines for pigs had arrived with a consignment of 300,000 more expected tomorrow.

"There are places concerned in this general areas that are not affected and the veterinarians have agreed that they will go from the outer area in towards the affected areas. So that outer areas will be given top priority because in the infected farms, the pigs will be destroyed," he said.

Last week, the Cabinet allocated RM35.5 million to conduct vaccination on 500,000 pigs and 292,000 residents in Ipoh, Bukit Pelanduk and Seremban-Sikamat.

However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the steps taken to contain the JE problem would cost the government RM49 million.

Chua said the help of Negeri Sembilan religious authority and Muslim doctors would be sought to persuade Muslims living near the affected areas to get vaccinated as a religious decree (fatwa) by the state mufti stipulated that it was allowable (diharuskan).

"At the same time, Chinese and Tamil doctors and nurses would be mobilised in an effort to have a better communication process with the people...we want the message to get across," he said.

He said a 24-hour operation centre would be opened at the Department of

Public Health at Bukit Damansara and manned by officers from all the six ministries.

The secretariat of the Task Force will meet every morning while the Task Force itself will meet again tomorrow (3.30pm) and Monday (11am).

Chua said local health authorities were in contact with foreign experts from the United States and Australia.

Asked whether a new strain of the JE had appeared, he said this could not yet be ascertained but the authorities were definitely sure that it was JE.

He also urged pig farmers to stop killing their pigs themselves but instead let the army and police do the job.

-- BERNAMA

MAM/AR AHH RM