

50% rise in dengue deaths



Stern warning: A banner declaring a park in Rawang as a dengue outbreak zone. The Selangor government has drawn up a plan to combat the menace. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star



PETALING JAYA: The number of dengue cases last year paints a scary picture. There was a more than 50% jump in the number of deaths caused by dengue compared to 2014.

This, according to the Health Ministry, was the highest number of dengue deaths ever recorded in the country.

According to the ministry, 336 people – an average of 28 a month – died from dengue last year compared to 215 in 2014, a rise of 56.3%.

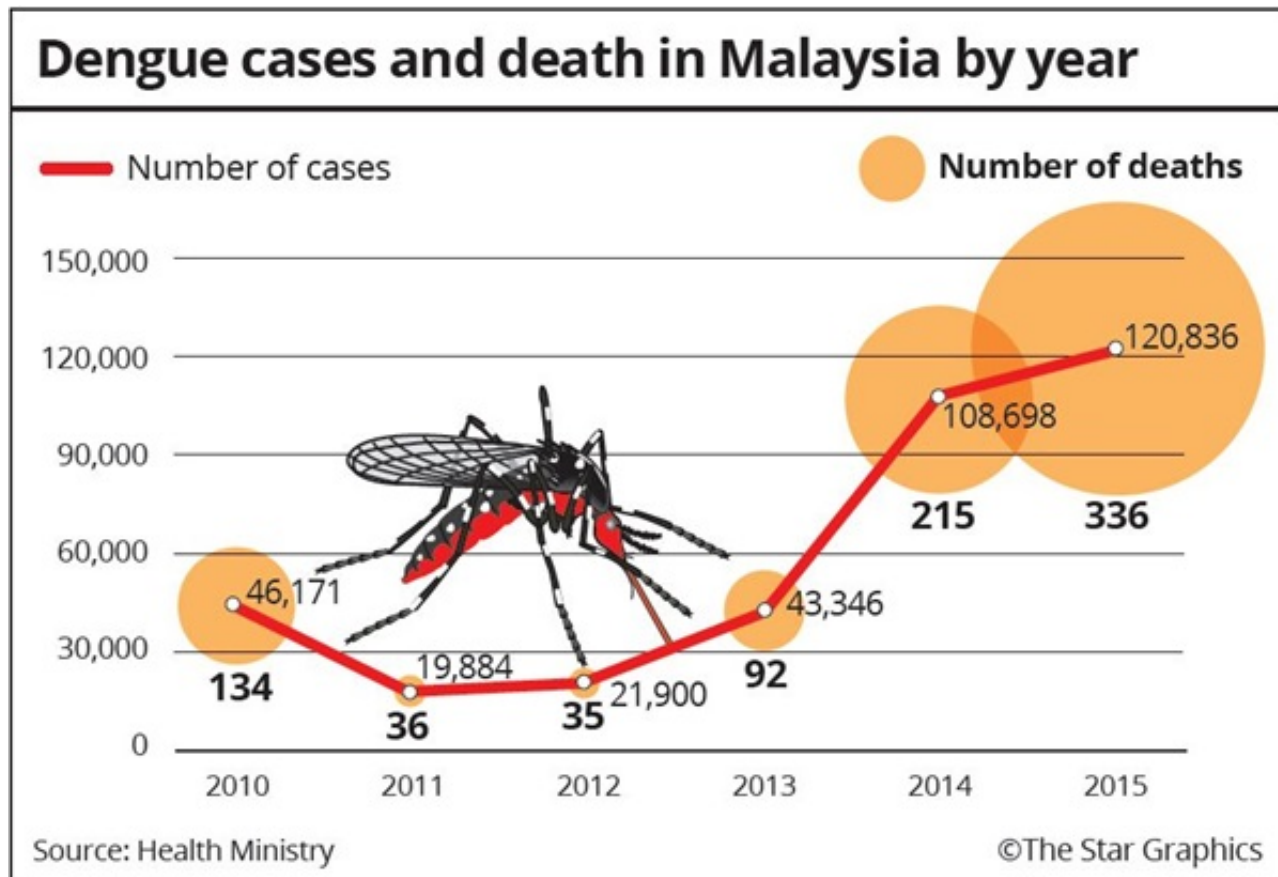
There was also an increase of 11.2% in the number of dengue cases throughout last year, up from 108,698 in 2014 to 120,836 cases.

That's 333 cases a month or 110 cases each day!

The ministry is now cautioning people to brace for an equally bad, if not worse, year ahead.

The ministry's Vector Borne Disease Sector (Disease Control Division) head Dr Rose Nani Mudin said the upward trend of dengue cases recorded in the country, corresponded with the rest of the world.

"World Health Organisation's (WHO) data also showed the number of cases increasing each year globally.



"The upward trend is also observed in other countries (with dengue), number of cases have been continuously increasing.

"It's a global phenomenon," said Dr Rose, who is also an epidemiologist.

The ministry's data also showed there were 145 dengue hotspots in the country, with Selangor having the highest number of hotspots at 107.

Other hotspots are in Johor (23), Perak (9), and Penang (3), while Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Negri Sembilan and Sabah have one each.

Dr Rose said climate change could be one of the factors contributing to the spike in dengue cases.

"Alternate rainy and hot seasons cause the Aedes breeding to increase," she said, adding that water collected in stagnant containers during the rainy season could

worsen the situation.

She said another factor was serotype changes in the dengue virus.

“Four to five months after a serotype shift, when one dengue serotype becomes prevalent, cases would increase due to lack of immunity against the new serotype.”

Poor community behaviour also contributed to the prevalence of the Aedes mosquitoes.

“Poor environmental cleanliness due to littering and inappropriate solid waste disposal are the main issues in the country and this resulted in the high Aedes breeding index,” she said.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Ashok Zachariah Phillip said many Malaysians only dengue-proofed their houses but not their neighbourhood.

“Most Malaysians are quite aware of the dangers of dengue but they don’t proactively go around and try and prevent it.

“They just take care of the areas around their house and that’s about it,” said Dr Ashok.

However, he said, the main breeding areas for Aedes mosquitoes were construction sites and places with a lot of debris and litter.

“That is where the breeding grounds are. Many of the hotspots are close to construction areas,” he said, adding that the community could take part in preventing Aedes breeding by cleaning their neighbourhood together and the council could send teams to construction sites to check on its cleanliness.