

# Concern over sudden spike in cases

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PETALING JAYA: Parents are worried over the sudden spike in the hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) among schoolchildren, coupled with the increase in dengue cases.

Mohd Tarmizi Hussain, 33, an engineer, said his four-year-old daughter was infected with HFMD after she came home from the nursery.

“Initially she had a fever and then started to develop red spots like chicken pox rashes all over her body. I was really worried when there were rashes in her mouth too. We immediately sought medical help,” he said yesterday.

He added that it took about a week for his daughter to recover but believed that more can be done by authorities to curb the spread at kindergartens and nurseries.

“I hope the relevant authorities can come up with a proper plan now that the number of cases is starting to spike,” he said.

He is among scores of parents whose children have been infected with HFMD recently.

Cases of Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD) this year have increased 15-fold compared to last year.

On Wednesday, Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said a total of 31,661 HFMD cases were recorded in Malaysia up to the 19th Epidemiology Week (EW19) compared to 2,121 cases recorded in 2021 over the same period of time.

As at May 14 this year, Selangor had contributed to the highest number of cases at 8,864, which is 28% of the total number of cases, followed by Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, both reporting 4,421 cases (14%).

Dengue cases also saw an increase by 51.5% in EW19 whereby 1,074 cases were reported compared to 709 cases registered in EW18.

Retiree Salihah Ibrahim, 79, said she had dengue right after the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration.

Initially, she thought that she had been infected with Covid-19 but it turned out to be dengue.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said dengue is endemic and needs to be managed regularly by ensuring the environment is free of the aedes mosquito which can carry the dengue virus.

“Prevention against dengue is a collective effort. Keep the environment clean and ensure there is no stagnant water collecting in containers as they can easily turn into breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

“Areas seeing a rise in cases may need the authorities to carry out fogging,” he said.

On HFMD, he pointed out that it is a seasonal disease which spreads through close contact with an infected person.

“After long periods of lockdown during the pandemic, we can of course expect cases of HFMD to be much higher than the last two years now that schools have reopened,” he said.

Public health expert Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar also agreed that dengue has been in the country for quite some time.

“We must also find ways of doing environmental intervention to control the spread of dengue more aggressively. The community and local authorities should play a bigger and more active role,” he added.