

Malaysia hit by first rabies deaths in almost 20 years

July 5 2017

Two Malaysian children have died after contracting rabies, the country's first such deaths in almost two decades, as authorities battle a rare outbreak of the disease, officials said Wednesday.

A six-year-old girl and her four-year-old brother died Tuesday after becoming infected with the disease in a [rural area](#) on the Malaysian part of Borneo island.

They were among three people confirmed to have been infected with [rabies](#), which in most cases is transmitted via [dog bites](#), according to Sarawak's local government and housing minister Sim Kui Hian.

"Two of the three confirmed cases... were pronounced dead," he said. "They were diagnosed to be brain dead and the parents have agreed for the life support to be withdrawn."

He said the other patient was still "critically ill".

Noor Hisham Abdullah, Malaysia's director general of health, told AFP that the cases were the first rabies-related deaths in the country in almost 20 years.

Five villages in the Serian district of Sarawak state, which borders the Indonesian part of Borneo, are confirmed as having been affected by the outbreak. Enormous, jungle-clad Borneo is shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

Sim said health teams in Serian had visited 19 villages as of Tuesday and carried out checks on over 6,000 people. Only three cases of humans contracting rabies have so far been confirmed.

Officials have ordered all dogs in the area to be vaccinated against rabies, reported state news agency Bernama.

Rabies causes inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, and is almost always fatal once contracted, according to the World Health Organization.

It mainly affects poor and vulnerable populations in rural areas, according to the WHO.

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