

Malaysia warns of waterborne disease after deaths

23 August 2010

(AP) -- Malaysia has closed parks and warned the public about swimming and dumping trash in rivers after up to 10 people died from a disease spread by rats.

The latest reported death from the bacterial disease leptospirosis was Saturday. The 17-year-old boy in northern Kedah state had swam in a river and had a picnic with friends at a recreational park last month, the New Straits Times and The Star reported.

Several parks throughout the country have been closed since the first deaths were reported last month. Some deaths were believed to have been caused by a separate waterborne disease, and a Health Ministry official could not immediately say how many were caused by leptospirosis.

The Health Ministry's website warns people not to swim in public rivers when it rains and to avoid taking a dip if they have cuts on their body, which makes an infection more likely.

Health Minister Liow Tiong Lai was quoted by the Times on Monday as saying his ministry would distribute leaflets and posters to raise awareness of the disease.

Leptospirosis is caused by exposure to water contaminated with urine of infected animals and absorbed through the skin. [Rats](#) are the main carriers, and the ministry's campaign urges people not to dump rubbish near water sources that could attract rats, he said.

Cases of the [disease](#) have been increasing in Malaysia. It killed 62 people last year, up from 20 in 2004. In the same period, the number of infections rose more than fivefold to more than 1,400 cases, up from 263.

Symptoms are severe [muscle pain](#), [fever](#), [vomiting](#) and headache, and leptospirosis is curable if the

person is treated within a week.

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