

HEALTH

Pet dogs blamed for rabies cases

POST REPORTERS

Pet dogs are a major cause of rabies cases as most domestic animals are not vaccinated, the Public Health Ministry has warned.

The government has made prevention of the disease a top priority since the Infectious Disease Act was introduced last year and it became apparent 80% of pet dogs have not been vaccinated.

The information was provided by permanent secretary for public health Sophon Mekthon.

Pet owners and family members are vulnerable to rabies-infected animals as they do not suspect the dogs they raise and are close to have the virus.

This year, three people have died of rabies outside of Bangkok. Five deaths were recorded last year, Dr Sophon said.

In the past, stray dogs were blamed for the spread of rabies. They were rounded up to be neutered and vaccinated. Rabies

attacks the central nervous system, causing brain malfunction and death.

Thailand has been on high alert against the disease since last year when the 2015 Infectious Disease Act took effect.

The Bureau of Epidemiology has spearheaded efforts to prevent and control the disease, Dr Sophon said. Its officials have worked across state agencies and gained support from the Department of Livestock and the Department of Local Administration.

City Hall has also carried out campaigns against rabies and said it was satisfied with the success in curbing the virus in the capital, Bangkok governor spokesman Wasan Meewong said.

Although no rabies infections have been reported in humans in Bangkok since 2013, City Hall urged pet owners to have their pet dogs vaccinated.

Currently 80% of pet animals, including dogs, are not vaccinated. They are often

allowed to go outside the house, making them susceptible to attacks by rabies-infected animals, Mr Wasan said.

Between 1999 and 2012, seven people died of rabies in Bangkok.

People have also been asked to inform local leaders and relevant authorities if they spot dogs and cats suspected of being exposed to rabies. Rabies symptoms in animals include them staggering and foaming at the mouth.

The Public Health Ministry has set a target of zero rabies infections in the country by 2020, which will bring Thailand up to the standard set by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

However, such a goal is suspected of being a factor that may cause some agencies to hesitate to report, or even cover up, the real number of rabies cases, Thiravat Hemachudha, chief of Thai Red Cross Society's emerging infectious disease centre, said in a radio interview.