

It's not killer EV71: Unimas

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In-campus medical officer says lab check confirms virus belongs to the common enterovirus type



DR ZAHARA: We had our lab check out the samples from the students.

By Puvaneswary Devindran

KUCHING: Some 20 students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) have contracted the Hand, Foot and Mouth (HFMD) disease, in-campus medical officer Dr Zahara Abdul Manap said yesterday.

She, however, assured that the enterovirus involved were not the EV71 strand which could cause death in children.

"We had our lab check out the samples from the students and it is confirmed that this is not the EV71. It is just one of the common enteroviruses which will not give much problem, especially since it is occurring among adults," she told reporters.

According to Dr Zahara, there are over 70 strands of the enteroviruses and the one found infecting the students was the 'plain' virus.

Disclosing yesterday that the first case was diagnosed last Monday, Dr Zahara said the other cases had also been checked and they were not of the EV71 type.

Several more cases of infection were awaiting confirmation from the lab, she added.

Of the earlier cases, she said the students presented the typical symptoms of the HFMD such as fever, mouth ulcers and vesicles on the palms of their hands.

According to her, these students

University lab will carry out an investigation

"The only thing we are worried about is the bug being passed around because of the mixing among the students and so forth. So besides limiting their activities, we have also advised them not to share personal items," she said.

On the possibility of the common enterovirus mutating to the deadly EV71, she said: "...we're not sure about that."

As the enterovirus infections were most likely to occur during certain seasons, especially in summer, Dr Zahara said what happened in the university was something out of the usual pattern and that the university lab would carry out an investigation.

She said this was the first case of its kind in Unimas.

Ess Khamisa Mohamad Urey, assistant registrar of Unimas media unit, said that she could not confirm as to how many infected cases would it take for the university to cease classes but assured that the current situation did not require such action to be taken and that the situation was under control.

With Dr Zahara yesterday was another Unimas medical officer, Dr Khatijah Bibi alias San San Aye.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan said that the situation should not be a cause for worry as it was just a common enterovirus.

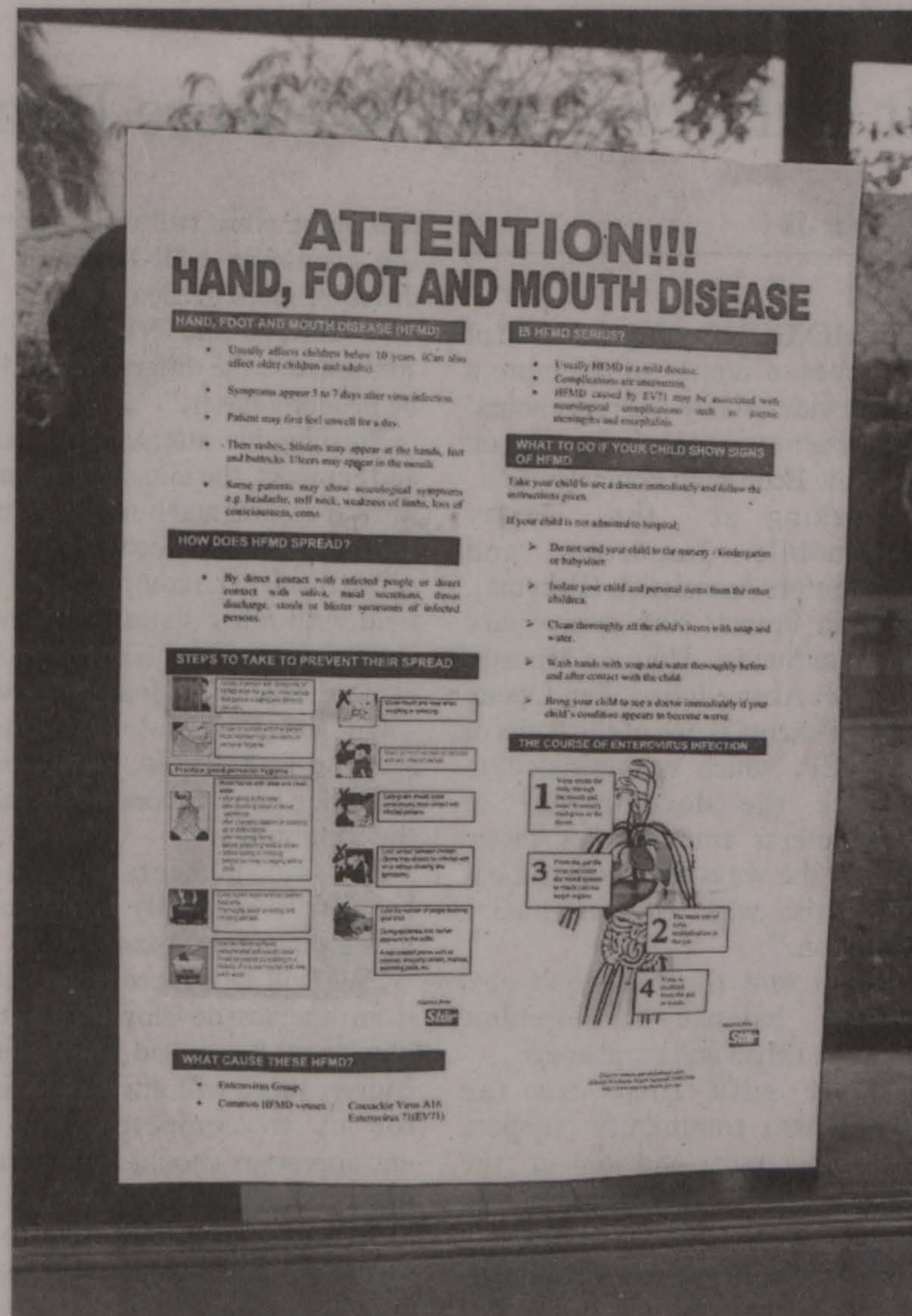
He said he was aware of the problem affecting the students, who were 21 and 24 years old, and that it was not the EV71.

"It's a notifiable disease which means that any medical officer who comes across it will have to report this to the State Health Department, which will then monitor the situation," he told The Borneo Post yesterday.

He said the enterovirus was preventable and this required one to practise proper hygiene, adding that so far there had been few cases in between but never serious.

Conceding that HFMD was known to be a seasonal disease that Sarawak would experience each year, Dr Chan said the state had its protocol on how to deal with it and was prepared should an outbreak occur.

"We will definitely keep members of the public notified over the situation so that preventable measures can be taken. But at the moment, there is nothing to worry about," he added.



STAY ALERT: The HFMD awareness poster put up outside Unimas clinic and also throughout the campus.