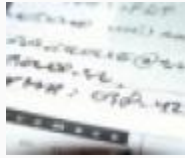


**on 02 October 2013**

## **Rajang River melioidosis strain cannot be detected with globally accepted tests**



KUCHING: Malaysia's longest river, the Rajang River in central Sarawak, might be the source of a different strain of melioidosis, a disease that has killed seven this year.

Newly released findings have indicated that globally accepted tests for patients suspected of contracting melioidosis might not work on the strain found in central Sarawak.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) scientist Yuwana Podin has found that up to 86% of samples taken from melioidosis cases in Sarawak cannot be detected using existing methods.

"From our samples and tests results, it would seem there could be a lot of under-diagnosis, and with doctors ending up prescribing less-than-ideal treatments," Yuwana told The Star yesterday.

Melioidosis symptoms are broad, including cough, abscess and fever, making detection all the more complicated. It is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium found in soil and water.

Yuwana's startling findings are contained in her doctorate thesis, conducted with the Menzies School of Health Research in Australia. Her research is the result of an agreement between Unimas and the Australian institute.

"We are only scratching the surface. The findings could have big implications," she said.

"The next step is to find out whether this is worldwide, which could mean a lot of under-diagnoses of the disease, or whether this is localised to Sarawak.

"So far, it would seem it is localised because results from here and from nearby Sabah are different."

Her findings will be published in two peer reviewed journals in the coming months namely the Clinical Microbiology Journal, and Journal of Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy.

Earlier this month, Yuwana presented parts of her findings to the international medical community at the World Melioidosis Congress in Bangkok, Thailand.

She also shared her findings during a workshop with public health professionals in Miri recently.

“If the Sarawak strain is indeed different, then the two things to concentrate on are to find better laboratory diagnosis methods, and more importantly, to locate the source of origin.”

Yuwana believed the source could be Rajang River or one of its tributaries.

“Almost all detected melioidosis cases in Sarawak are around Belaga, Kapit, Sibu and Bintulu. If we find the source, then disease prevention can be improved through public health intervention.”

Last year, some 40 cases were reported in the state, including one death.

The year before that, there were 121 cases and 11 deaths reported.

According to the state Health Department, 36 melioidosis have been detected in Sarawak this year. They were detected Bintulu (18 cases), Kapit and Selangau (four cases each), Tatau, Miri, Sibu, Selangau and Belaga (two cases each).

The seven deaths were at Selangau, Kapit, Belaga and Bintulu. The victims were between 10 and 53 years old, including two Indonesians and one Filipino.

Source: The Star Online