

# Unimas to host regional symposium on Zoonoses and Emerging Infectious Diseases

**KUCHING:** A two-day regional symposium on Zoonoses and Emerging Infectious Diseases, the first of its kind in Borneo, will be held in Sarawak on Jan 21 - 22.

Members of the public are invited to participate.

The symposium, organised by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Faculty of Resource Science and Technology will take place at the Unimas Centre of Academic Information Services, where various world experts on zoonoses disease will conduct the symposium.

Unimas Research and Innovative vice-chancellor Professor Dr Murtedza Mohamed said zoonosis is a study discipline dealing with addressing the transmission of animal diseases to humans.

"In the past couple of decades we had cases of emergence and re-emergence of animal diseases to humans, and some cases were the Japanese encephalitis, Nipah viral infections and malarial parasites.

"Therefore, there is a need to understand these health issues



**ZOONOSES DISEASES SYMPOSIUM :** (From left) Tajuddin, Murtedza, and Unimas Faculty of Medicine and Health Science dean Tan Sri Datu Professor Dr Mohamad Taha Arif at the press conference. — Photo by Chiew Su Ting

better, and the public is encouraged to attend the symposium," he said at a press conference here yesterday.

He said the three main goals of the symposium would be, firstly, to assemble, understand, document and disseminate information on the current state of knowledge from researches in this region dealing with animal-related diseases or pathogens, which are zoonotic and

potentially zoonotic.

"The next is to understand the gaps in our knowledge of the human-animal interface in the promotion of good human and wildlife health," he said.

He said the third goal was to initiate greater collaboration among Malaysian and international scientists in the promotion of good environmental management for the control of zoonotic diseases.

"We want to identify the infective agents, what are the viruses, bacteria involved in zoonotic diseases, and with the gathered information, we can better understand the complex epidemiology and ecological mechanisms that directly impact the health of wildlife and human beings," he added.

Murtedza was positive that after the symposium, Unimas could formulate researches on this subject

in Sarawak and Borneo.

Unimas Faculty of Medicine and Health Science Molecular Parasitologist Professor Balbir Singh said the university had carried out studies on the transmission of malaria in Kapit, and the result had been published in 2004.

"In this study, we were looking at malarial parasites in monkeys, and under the microscope the monkey malarial parasites looks just like those in human. So we could not make any differences," he said.

However, by using molecular techniques, the university was looking into more samples to understand the transmission of this disease, he added.

Similarly, other animals such as bats had been associated with Nipah viral infection, and Unimas Zoological Department head Professor Madya Dr Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah said there were no such cases reported in Sarawak.

"Previous work had been done in Peninsular Malaysia and a few species of bats had been found having Nipah virus in Kuala Nipah, which

gave the virus its name," he said.

Reporters were told that the university would be conducting research in various groups of animal such as rodents and treeshrew in relation to zoonoses diseases.

On Jan 21, a session on historical background and current state of knowledge by United States of America Consortium for Conservation will be held at 8.30am.

This will be followed by research presentation by several experts from Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia and Japan before the session concludes at 5.30pm.

On Jan 22, the symposium will resume at 9am, to be facilitated by Dr Peter and Dr Hume Field from Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Australia before finishing with a discussion at 4 pm.

Registration fees will be RM350, and this will cover symposium materials, tea and lunches.

The fee must be paid in full prior to or on the day of registration.

For registration and more information visit [www.unimas.my](http://www.unimas.my).