

The unseen threat of rat infestation

PETALING JAYA: The quick decision to visit the health clinic saved student Muhammad Akhbar Shah Ayub Khan's life after experiencing fever, diarrhoea and extreme body aches.

The 22-year-old from Ulu Kelang, Ampang, however, did not anticipate that he would end up in the hospital due to leptospirosis, an illness caused by an infection with the bacteria *Leptospira*.

"I actually thought I had dengue because of the symptoms; my body was aching too much. The decision to go to the clinic really saved me because they did a blood test and found my white blood cell count to be low.

"They arranged for an ambulance to take me to Hospital Ampang because I was already weak. After a thorough blood test, they discovered I had contracted leptospirosis.

"I was warded and the hospital immediately administered antibi-

otics, and after several days I managed to get better," he said.

Asked how he could have come into contact with the bacteria, Akhbar said rats could have urinated on the shoes that he wore.

He said there are issues with rats in the drains around his housing area, and despite attempts to get rid of the rodents, there's always a few lurking around.

"These rats are smart; they know how to avoid traps and rat poison. We try our best to ward them off, but one or two still roam around the porch.

"Usually, if I see one, I try to catch or kill it. They come out mostly at night, and it is a real problem because we need to find their hiding places to eradicate them.

"The rat urinated on my shoes, probably because it was the only thing that was outside on the porch. Every now and then, you see one or two quickly dashing back into the drains," he said.

He said the local council should carry out more efforts to eradicate the population of rats in housing areas.

Retiree David Chetty from Melaka, 80, was devastated after his pet dogs (a Pomeranian and a mongrel) suddenly became seriously ill.

While one managed to survive the ordeal, the other succumbed to its illness after enduring weakness, vomiting, hair loss and diarrhoea.

"I keep my house clean inside and out. The dogs eat from their bowls only. So, I am surprised both of them fell ill and eventually one perished.

"I believe it might have been rats, as they have a habit of urinating on the dogs' food bowls. I no longer leave the bowls on the floor anymore.

"I am on a mission to catch these pesky rodents. They are a menace to society," he said.

David had set traps and placed

rat poison to catch the rats in the housing area.

He hopes that by doing so, residents in the neighbourhood as well as pets can be saved from getting leptospirosis.

David also urged his neighbours, who feed stray cats, to clean up after them.

"I think the onus is on the residents to keep the housing area clean because we don't want to promote or create an environment for rats to come," he said.

In curbing the population of rats in the city, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has caught 26,232 rats from Jan 24 until June 24.

Some of the contributing factors to the presence of rats include food waste and illegal dumping grounds, which become the source of food and dirty premises, DBKL said.

"Public members must be wise and eat only on clean premises that do not face rodent problems," it added.