

A descriptive study of laboratory-confirmed adult human rabies death cases admitted to Sarawak General Hospital from 1st June 2017 to 30th June 2023

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Rabies has been a major public health issue in Sarawak since June 2017. It is a highly preventable disease through proper wound washing and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) after an animal bite. Despite the wide availability of rabies PEP in government clinics and hospitals, human rabies death is still increasing in Sarawak. We aim to understand the characteristics of laboratory-confirmed adult human rabies death cases admitted to Sarawak General Hospital. **Methods:** Data on patient demographics and clinical characteristics of adult human rabies death cases were collected retrospectively from 1st June 2017 to 30th June 2023. **Results:** A total of 29 adult human rabies death cases were analysed. Most patients were male gender (86%), a median age of 49 years old, from Kuching (45%) and presented between 4 to 12 weeks from time bitten (67%). 18 (62%) had a history of dog bites; the majority were provoked bites (50%) by free-roaming domestic dogs (67%), on the upper body (50%), with category 3 wounds (83%). 26 (90%) did not seek medical attention post-bite, therefore no PEP was given. **Conclusion:** Our study highlighted that the majority who died of rabies did not seek PEP despite its availability. There is an urgent need to address the gap in community awareness of rabies and treatment-seeking behaviour, in order to achieve zero rabies death by 2030.