

AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 9

RUANGAN : NATION

Three test positive for diphtheria

Ministry: They were living in the same house as two-year-old victim who died

PETALING JAYA: Three other children tested positive for diphtheria, following the death of a two-year-old on Feb 21.

The Health Ministry said all four children were living in the same house in Johor Baru.

The boy is believed to have died due to complications from the disease.

"As of Saturday, three more diphtheria cases have been confirmed.

"One of the patients is the sister of the victim, aged four, who lives in

the same house.

"Another four-year-old boy and a girl, aged 15, who also live in the same house, also tested positive for the disease," the ministry said in a statement.

It said all three had been given treatment and one of them was allowed to return home.

"A total of 10 other children, with symptoms and living in the same house, were treated but tests conducted on them found that they were not affected by diphtheria,"

the statement added.

Apart from this, the ministry said eight other people, living in the same house, did not show any symptoms but were given antibiotics as a preventive measure.

It said those treated would be monitored daily at the Johor Baru Health Office for 14 days, adding that no new cases had been reported.

The death of the toddler, who was not immunised against the disease, led to a public debate on whether

immunisation should be made mandatory.

On Feb 23, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said that a law might be tabled in Parliament to make the move compulsory.

Misinformation about vaccination had led to a huge jump in the number of vaccine-preventable diseases, with cases of measles increasing 10-fold from 125 in 2013 to 1,467 last year.

A lack of immunisation was detected last year in all six measles

deaths recorded and in 19 of the 22 deaths from whooping cough (pertussis). There were five fatal diphtheria cases last year, involving children below 10.

Diphtheria is caused by the infection of the bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, and symptoms range from fever with sore throat, thick covering in the back of the throat and swollen tonsils.

The disease can lead to difficulty breathing, heart failure, paralysis and even death.