

Department of Livestock Development saddles up for AHS vaccination

The Department of Livestock Development (DLD) said it is ready to ramp up vaccinations for African Horse Sickness (AHS) in at-risk zones, including parts of Bangkok and neighbouring provinces, to curb the spread of the disease, which has killed 543 horses.

DLD director-general Sorravis Thaneto on Tuesday said the AHS outbreak has slowed after receiving reports of low horse fatality numbers in 10 provinces.

"Some of them have not had any losses for three weeks. It is a very good sign," Mr Sorravis said. "We can bring the plague under control. With a new batch of vaccines, we will begin inoculating the remaining horses soon."

He made the statement to reporters after a meeting with other officials to discuss AHS-preventive measures in Bangkok and surrounding provinces. The meeting was held at Kasetsart University's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

Mr Sorravis noted new AHS cases have not been reported in and around the capital, including in Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi provinces recently.

According to the DLD, Thailand is now going through the first six-month stage of immediate outbreak control.

It will enter the surveillance period for 90 days after the death of the last horse infected by the disease, it said, noting the kingdom will apply for the World Organization for Animal Health's (OIE) AHS-free status in two years.

Noppawan Buanithup, director of Disease Control and Veterinary Services, said the outbreak response areas will be divided into three zones: infected, protected and at-risk.

Dr Noppawan said an infected zone can cover 20 kilometres, while protected and at-risk can cover 50 and 100 kilometres, respectively.

"While disease monitoring [such as temperature checks] is conducted in all zones, the vaccine is given to those in the epicentre and its 50-kilometre radius," he said.

"For the at-risk zones, [vaccines] will be delivered to areas based on horse population, movement of stock and wind direction."

"Adjacent provinces and parts of Bangkok will be covered," Dr Noppawan added.

Meanwhile, the sub-committee on the prevention and control of AHS in zebras, led by Assoc Prof Dr Panthep Ratanakorn Panthep Ratanakorn of the Chulabhorn Royal Academy, is working with other conservation groups to collect zebra blood samples.

Zebras are blamed for the first outbreak in Thailand.

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