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A NEWS report in a local Malay language newspaper gave false claims that monkeys (macaques) in Malaysia may be carrying the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

This information was not provided by anyone from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and is not based on any scientific research.

The article claims that 2,000 monkeys were examined and 80 per cent of them had the deadly disease. We have not conducted any such research and the claims are false.

I am not aware of any research that has provided evidence that local monkeys harbour the HIV or that they can transmit HIV to humans.

Research done overseas has shown that monkeys may be infected with SIV (simian immunodeficiency virus) and simian foamy virus (SFV) that can cause SAIDS (Simian Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) but they do not affect humans.

No SIV or SFV infections have been reported in local monkeys.

Even cats have a form of feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), but it doesn't infect humans.

Our research focuses mainly on parasitic and bacterial diseases of wild and captive monkeys.

We are also interested to know more about the potential diseases that may be transmitted to humans (zoonosis).

A small percentage of the long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) are known to harbour a malaria parasite (*Plasmodium knowlesi*), which is also found in humans.

However, there is no evidence to show that human infections are from these macaques.

In addition, the mosquito vector responsible for transmitting this infection is not found in urban areas but is restricted to the forests, minimising the risks of transmission to urban dwellers.

The macaque disease and behaviour research team at the Centre for Wildlife Research and Conservation, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Universiti Putra Malaysia, is headed by Prof Datuk Dr Abdul Rani Bahaman and comprises myself, Dr Sumita Sug-naseelan, Prof Madya Dr Shaik Amin Babjee and Prof Madya Dr Abdul Rahim Mutalib.

We are working closely with the Wildlife and National Parks Department and the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to ascertain the extent of zoonotic diseases in local macaques and to determine optimal techniques for macaque population control in urban areas.

Wild and captive monkeys may also harbour common gastrointestinal parasites seen in other animals like blastocystis, cryptosporidium, giardia, entamoeba and balantidium and bacteria like salmonella and *Escherichia coli*.

These parasites may be zoonotic if humans accidentally ingest food or drink water contaminated with infected monkey faeces.

These pathogens are not confined to monkeys alone but may also be present in pet animals, livestock, wildlife and even in the environment.

Most of these micro-organisms are specific species and many strains are not pathogenic to humans. It is not always the case that the infection is transmitted from monkeys to humans.

In fact, humans may be the source of infection of these pathogens to wild and captive monkeys.

Hepatitis and tuberculosis have also been reported in macaques in other countries, but there are no reports of these infections in our local wild monkeys.

There is a need to study the occurrence of diseases in wild monkeys in the country in order to ascertain the zoonotic potential of these diseases. Emphasis should

be on diagnostics, epidemiology and vector research.

We need to know what pathogens these monkeys carry and if these pose a risk to humans.

There is also an urgent need to come up with a strategy for macaque population control for the country. In order to be effective, these control measures should not be localised, but must involve macaques living around human settlements, recreation areas and adjacent forests.

However, any population control techniques must take into serious consideration the welfare of macaques and must be done under strict veterinary supervision and in a humane manner.

The public is urged not to act cruelly to these animals as these macaques have been displaced from their natural environment and it is we who have encroached into their habitat.

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There is no study to show that local monkeys have HIV or that they can transmit the virus to humans.