Fish spas pose health risks, says Liow

KUALA LUMPUR: Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai yesterday cautioned the people against going to fish spas to avoid the risk of infection.

"The risk of a person getting infected with skin or waterborne diseases at fish spas is definitely there. Both the fish and the water could cause infection."

Liow added that there were reports which stated that diseases like hepatitis C or HIV/AIDS and other skin ailments could be transmitted via fish spas if the operators did not change the water regularly.

"It is unhygienic for public use," he said after closing the National Communication For Behavioural Impact convention here.

"If customers step into the spa water and if they have an infectious wound, it could definitely spread to others who step into that very same spa tank.

"The problem is that the water is filled with fish. Therefore, operators cannot add chemicals like chlorine to kill the bacteria as this could kill the fish, too."

Fish spa therapy is popular and can be found in many shopping centres in the country. The therapy involves customers placing their feet into a water tank filled with toothless Garra Rufa fish, also known as "doctor fish".

Within seconds, the fish will gather at customers' feet and nibble the dead skin tissue away which cleans and exfoliates the skin.

On another matter, Liow said community-based efforts helped in reducing fatalities in dengue cases by 78 per cent from January to this month compared with the same period last year.

"As of Oct 16 this year, a total of 15,524 dengue cases with 26 deaths were recorded against 39,264 cases with 117 deaths last year."

The decline in dengue cases was based on collective community efforts and cooperation.