

Headline	Two mushroom poisoning deaths recorded in Sabah — professor		
MediaTitle	Borneo Post (KK)		
Date	12 Jul 2018	Color	Black/white
Section	Home	Circulation	19,988
Page No	4	Readership	59,964
Language	English	ArticleSize	334 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 931
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 2,793



Dr Normah (standing, centre) with participants and invited speakers in the UMS 'Toxic Mushroom: Identification and Management' course.

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KOTA KINABALU: Many communities nowadays are unable to distinguish edible mushrooms from toxic mushrooms, resulting in poisoning and in some cases, fatality.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Deputy Vice-chancellor (Research and Innovation) Professor Dr Shahril Yusof said the State Health Department recorded 20 out of 111 mushroom poisoning cases between 2001 and 2017, two of which resulted in deaths between 2011 and 2016.

The deaths were recorded in Kota Belud and Kota Marudu, he said, where studies had found that some Kota Marudu mushroom sellers placed a mixture of edible and toxic mushrooms to be sold by the road.

"This is worrisome because it shows that many in Sabah, and Malaysia as a whole, are still unable to identify and differentiate toxic mushrooms from edible ones.

"Mushroom poisoning cases are serious and preventive measures must be put in place to overcome this problem," he said, at the closing of the UMS 'Toxic Mushroom: Identification and Management' course, yesterday.

His speech was delivered by Research and Innovation Centre director Associate Professor Dr Normah Awang Besar.

Dr Shahril said the course was organised with the aim of raising awareness on toxic mushroom poisoning cases prevalent in Sabah, in addition to providing training to officers in government departments in the State as well as in West Malaysia.

"The course is also to add knowledge on the variety of edible and inedible mushrooms in Sabah.

"Moreover, we also wanted to strengthen interaction between government department and private sector personnel, as well as NGOs, so the e-mushroom emergency network is more

alert towards poisoning cases in Sabah," he added.

The course received attendance from 26 participants of diverse backgrounds, namely from the State Health Department, Sabah Parks, Sabah Foundation Group, Sabah Forestry Department, Sarawak Forestry Department and Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Forever Sabah Kampung Babagon Toki, Inanam.

Invited speakers were Kuala Lumpur Hospital Emergency and Trauma Department medical officer Dr Baran Palanimuthu, Sabah State Health Department medical officer Dr Michal Christina Steven and Dr Jaya Seelan Sathiya Seelan.

Participants also took part in a mushroom sampling activity at the UMS Hill trail, where they learned how to identify and differentiate edible and poisonous mushrooms.