

Eight people a day on average contract HIV daily in Malaysia



An average of eight people contract Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) a day in the country, says Dr Zaliha Mustafa (pic).

The Health Minister said that the continued prevalence of new infections could derail the nation's goal of ending HIV/AIDS by 2030.

“In general, Malaysia has succeeded in lowering new infections by up to 50% between 2000 and 2009.

“Nevertheless, beginning in 2010 and presently, the rate of decrease in infections is slowing down to 24% between 2010 and 2022.

“On average, a total of 3,000 new HIV cases are reported annually and this is a threat to Malaysia's ability achieving its commitment in ending HIV/AIDS by 2030,” she said in a written reply to Muhammad Ismi Mat Taib (PN-Parit) in the Dewan Rakyat on Monday (Nov 27).

Muhammad wanted to know if HIV was still spreading in the country and what were the latest measures to curb its spread.

On the HIV pandemic, Dr Zaliha said the main risk of infections was through sharing of hypodermic needles among drug addicts.

However, beginning 2011, she said sexual transmission of the virus was the main risk reported to the ministry.

“In 2022, a total of 60% of HIV infections were due to heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual relations while 36% were through heterosexual relations,” she said.

She added that the young between 20 and 39 years old were the highest contributors to HIV, making up 77% where over 90% were males.

“Almost all of them, some 97%, were infected through sexual transmission,” she said.

Dr Zaliha said that beginning this year, the ministry had embarked on a pilot project “PrEPGov2023” at 18 health clinics between January and December.

She said the pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication is given as an effective preventive measure as scientific studies have shown that it prevents sexual transmission of HIV by up to 99%.

Other steps being taken, she said, was through the increase of awareness on preventing the spread of the virus among youths.

This includes avoiding high risk activities, periodic screening, early anti-retroviral (ART) treatment if infected.

She added that the ministry has also introduced the Prostar module to increase awareness among youths on HIV.

She said the module was further streamlined last year with the latest knowledge on prevention and stigma issues.

Dr Zaliha also said that the ministry is working closely with non-governmental organisations and community health workers to provide counseling and support to high risk groups.

She noted that parents also play an important role in guiding the young to lead a more healthy lifestyle. – The Star