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Government hospitals to treat STD

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - From next year, all government hospitals and clinics will offer treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and screening tests for HIV/AIDS, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said.

Chua said the move was based on feedback received by his Ministry which indicated that people suffering STD like gonorrhoea and syphilis were often too embarrassed to approach STD clinics for treatment.

"The programme will enable them to undergo the treatment and tests in privacy and, hopefully, encourage a greater section of the public to undergo voluntary screening tests."

He added the Ministry had been informed that in the kampung and smaller towns especially, the public were too afraid to go to STD clinics for tests.

"There is supposed to be a confidential relationship between doctor and patient, yet in the smaller towns and kampung news gets around by word-of-mouth," he said after launching the Red Ribbon Carnival today at Stadium Negara.

Studies in Africa have indicated that a person infected with STD like gonorrhoea and syphilis is at greater risk of contracting AIDS.

"Two to nine times more people who were infected with STD tested HIV positive compared to those who have not," Chua said.

The reason, he said, was because STD damaged organs in the body which exposed them to infections.

Later, he said 78 per cent of expectant mothers have undergone HIV/AIDS screening tests under a pioneer project which begun last year at government clinics and hospitals in Perlis, Kelantan and Johor.

Chua said that in Perlis and Kelantan itself, almost 98 per cent of expectant mothers wanted to go for the tests after receiving counselling.

The programme also incorporates an AZT drug treatment programme for expectant mothers and babies infected with AIDS.

Trials at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital showed more than 90 per cent of the babies could be saved if their expectant mothers were treated with AZT.

Of the 500,000 babies born each year, 425,000 are delivered at government hospitals.

Chua also said 300 new HIV cases had been reported so far this year. Of these, 66 were below the age of 19.

Some 22,899 HIV cases had been reported between September 1986 and September 1997. Of these, 1,236 developed into AIDS, resulting in 984 deaths.

Earlier, Chua flagged off more than 1,000 participants in the carnival's "Walk of Hope" at Dataran Merdeka.

The walk was organised by the Malaysian AIDS Foundation in conjunction with World AIDS Day to promote public solidarity against the impact of AIDS in Malaysia.

Foundation president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said the solidarity achieved through the participation of people from all walks of life in the carnival, would help Malaysians overcome social discrimination against AIDS victims, especially children.

"We are confident this walk will provide the impetus to rally Malaysians to work closely to minimise the level of discrimination and apathy against children directly affected by AIDS," she said.

Earlier, Marina received a RM20,000 contribution from Merck, Sharp and

Dohme country manager Ewe Kheng Huat.
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