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## New laws move to curb abortions

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Health Ministry can only act against illegal abortions based on complaints as it has limited powers under the law.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the ministry's enforcement unit was ineffective in dealing with this problem.

"We will seek more powers under future legislations," he said without specifying the new legislations.

He was asked to comment on the findings of a 1994-1996 study by the National Population and Family Development Board which revealed that one in four girls aged between 13 and 18 years old had sex or are sexually active.

Many of them ended up being pregnant and had undergone abortions.

Chua was speaking to reporters after the launch of the First Asian International Congress on Emergency Medicine '97 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Putra Trade World Centre.

Doctors are disallowed to perform abortions unless the pregnancy causes health problems to the mother.

"(They) are required to certify that a particular patient should have an abortion based on health or medical grounds," he said. "Where the patient is in critical condition, a doctor can abort the foetus."

Doctors cannot perform an abortion in Malaysia if a woman claimed she entered into a relationship by choice and had become pregnant.

Illegal abortion is punishable under the penal code, which the offending doctor would be subject to a fine, jail term or both.

Often, Chua said a doctor performed an illegal abortion by claiming that the patient was bleeding or suffering from other medical conditions that required an abortion.

"This is their usual line of excuse," he said.

So far, there have been no cases where disciplinary action was taken against a doctor for performing illegal abortions.

Under present circumstances, the police would be the best enforcement authority, not the ministry or the Malaysian Medical Council.

Police could also initiate investigations based on a formal complaint or information that they had received indirectly.

When asked what action could be taken to address the problem of illegal abortions, Chua said the problem should be tackled at its roots, which was the behaviour of youth.

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