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Chua-Test

STD TESTS AVAILABLE IN RURAL GOVT CLINICS NEXT YEAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- Starting next year, tests for sexually transmitted diseases and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) will be available even in rural government clinics and healthcare centres, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today.

This means that those who want to undergo those tests need not go to special STD clinics, he said.

At present, only government hospitals and some outpatient clinics offered such testing services, he told reporters after launching and participating in the "Walk of Hope" at the Merdeka Square here.

The event was part of the Red Ribbon Carnival '97 held in conjunction with World AIDS Day on Dec 1.

Chua said the public currently shied away from testing because they feared the social implications of being seen entering STD clinics to get themselves tested.

As such, many did not know that they were sufferers or carriers and thus failed to take precautions or remedial measures in view of their condition.

Chua urged those who were exposed to high-risk activities to get themselves tested so that they could be helped if found positive.

Precautions must also be taken to ensure that they did not spread their disease to others, he said, stressing the importance of testing.

Although there was still no cure or vaccine for HIV-infection, there were ways to treat the HIV-positive so that they continued to live an extended productive life.

Chua said studies point to STD sufferers being two to nine times more at risk of contracting the HIV.

A total of 3,685 STD cases had been detected since 1996, he added.

On HIV-testing for pregnant women, Chua said the pilot project implemented in Perlis, Kelantan and Johor found 78 per cent of expectant mothers undergoing maternity checks in clinics willing to undergo the blood tests.

Nevertheless, the government would not make such testing compulsory, he said.

From 1986 to September 1997, 22,899 HIV cases were reported to the ministry, 1,236 of which deteriorated into AIDS.

Asked about claims of certain traditional medicines showing promise as a cure for AIDS, Chua said these substances might exist but he believed they appeared to work because they boosted the patient's immune system.

Some 1,000 people, including Malaysian AIDS Foundation Chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, participated in the walk. -- BERNAMA

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