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AIDS education effective when discussed openly

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - HIV and AIDS education for teenagers will be more effective when issues are discussed openly and on a personal level, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said today.

"There is always going to be a barrier in HIV/AIDS education if we do not acknowledge that teenage schoolchildren are aware of sexual practices," she told reporters after giving a talk on "Teenagers and HIV/AIDS" to fifth and sixth formers of Methodist Girls School.

"They need to be educated on HIV and its links to sexual practices. Thus we have to be bold and direct in HIV/AIDS education programmes."

Marina said it was difficult to determine teenagers' level of comprehension of HIV/AIDS as there was no survey done in the country. She added that there was a noticeable difference in the level of understanding between teenagers in cities compared to their counterparts in rural areas.

"Teenagers in rural areas have less access to information and moreover issues with the slightest relation to sexual practices are not often talked about.

"Schools may hold an exhibition on HIV/AIDS, but usually only scientific facts are emphasised while the part on human relationship is missing."

She said another important aspect in HIV/AIDS education was the need to address the diverse groups of teenagers and to acknowledge the different problems and social conditions which they lived in, as it was important for teenagers to be able to relate their knowledge of HIV/AIDS to daily life.

Marina said talks on HIV/AIDS issues for teenagers were good as an eye-opener but their participation in workshops where they were on a one-to-one level with counsellors would be more useful.

Earlier, Marina discussed ways one could be infected with the virus, followed by a question-and-answer session where she was asked, among others, if humans could get HIV infection through mosquito bites and how to react to people with HIV/AIDS.

The talk was organised in conjunction with the school's Anti-Dadah Week.

An exhibition on dadah addiction and HIV/AIDS by the City Hall's Health Department is also being held this week.

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