

26 FEB 1998

AIDS-Vaccine

TRIALS BEGIN ON ANTI-AIDS VACCINE FROM SARAWAK TREE

KUCHING, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- Clinical trials for an anti-AIDS vaccine from a species of the Bintangor tree found in Sarawak is now in the second phase, Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr George Chan said today.

The study currently being conducted jointly by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) and American experts at the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta is expected to be known within two years, he told reporters after opening a workshop on "HIV/AIDS: Our responsibility, our problem" here.

Dr Chan said the vaccine would be used on human beings only in the final stage after it has been approved by medical experts.

Clinical trials on such vaccines or drugs worldwide had been proven to be costly.

Earlier he said the Health ministry's programme to have expectant mothers screened for HIV infection would be implemented in Sarawak in stages from next week.

On the number of reported AIDS cases in the state, he said 12 people had died of the disease since it was first detected here in Nov 1991.

In terms of gender, men formed over 86 percent of the 133 HIV cases and 18 advanced AIDS cases notified to the department up to last month.

In Sarawak, over 85 percent of HIV infection was contracted through heterosexual contacts unlike in Peninsular Malaysia where drug-taking problems posed a serious threat to the spread of the disease.

Malaysian AIDS Council President Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir in her speech, said it was worrying that most HIV-positive patients in Malaysia only came for medical treatment at a late stage because of ignorance or the fear of being stigmatised by society.

She said the rising trend of 300 reported HIV cases per month in the country compared to only 500 per year in Australia was expected to continue.

From 1985 to November last year there were 23,571 HIV/AIDS cases and 1,051 AIDS-related deaths reported in Malaysia.

The two-day workshop organised by the Sarawak AIDS Network is aimed at exposing participants to the progressive measures available for HIV/AIDS persons. The high risk people included drug users, commercial sex workers and homosexuals.-- BERNAMA

CJ AAM