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Chua-HIV

HEALTH MINISTRY PROPOSES TO BETTER UNDERSTAND FATWA ON AIDS

KOTA TINGGI, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- The Health Ministry proposes to better understand the fatwa of the Johor Islamic Affairs Council which makes it mandatory for Muslims to undergo HIV/AIDS screening before getting married effective November this year.

He said the ministry had just heard about the requirement and needed complete information on the proposal by the state government, he said after attending the launching of the National Adolescent Health Policy by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at Bandar Penawar near here.

Chua said his ministry realised that the Johor Government's move reflected its deep concern for the future of the children born of couples one of whom could be HIV/AIDS affected.

He said this when asked to comment on the Johor Government's proposal to have this HIV/AIDS test.

On the facilities for such tests and the cost involved, Chua said his ministry previously had a special allocation for this, particularly for pregnant women.

"Discussions will be continued with all relevant agencies and I will get the views of the Director-General of Health to see if we had the capacity to carry out the tests," he said.

On the National Adolescent Health Service to be introduced in health clinics nationwide next year, Chua said the programme had been recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

So far a total of 169 health clinics had this programme and a total of 350,000 adolescents already had this service and counselling, he added.

Meanwhile the President of the Malaysian Aids Council Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the implementation of the Fatwa on Johor Muslims needed to be reviewed as it would give rise to many problems if enforced.

She said this when asked to comment on newsreports that Muslims in Johor wishing to get married should undergo HIV/AIDS screening effective Nov 13.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the fatwa issued by the Johor Islamic Affairs Department would cover all Muslims including those who converted to Islam recently.

According to Marina many problems would arise if the fatwa was implemented because several issues had not been fully studied by the Johor Health Department.

"I think Jabatan Kesihatan (Health Department) has not presented the complete fact and the epidemiological analysis is poor. And the basis of this fatwa is based on that poor analysis," she told a news conference here.

Marina said among the items that should be given attention was the question of the window period, whereby Muslim couples, under the fatwa, should undergo the HIV/AIDS tests only three months before the date of marriage.

"If a person is still within the window period, the virus cannot be detected in his body. We need to wait three or six months to get an accurate result," she said.

She said if a person was tested before the window period, he would test negative.

"This is dangerous. The purpose of protecting the couple will be

defeated and if they get married and then one of them is found HIV positive, who is going to take the responsibility?" she said.

She also spoke about "rapid tests" where the result could be obtained within 15 minutes but if a person had active antibodies, the test would give a reactive result where it could not be ascertained if the person was HIV positive or otherwise.

She said further confirmation should be obtained via "Elisa Testing."

She felt that the Johor Health Department had no provisions to confirm reactive results.

Marina said this was a big issue because a reactive person should not be assumed to have contracted the virus without confirmation.

She said the Aids Council had no problem over the implementation of the fatwa but was merely being rational as it was not based on "good.... sound scientific basis".

"No problem with the aim of the Religious Affairs Department.....we also have the same aim but only from the aspect of implementation there are so many unanswered questions that need to be ironed out so that there will not be any negative effects..... with the aim of it all not being realised."

-- BERNAMA

MUN AHH AAM