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Negri also wants blood tests for Muslim couples

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Negri Sembilan Government has decided to join Johor in enforcing a requirement for Muslim couples wishing to get married to undergo a mandatory blood test, to check for diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said the State Religious Council had already decided on the matter but would conduct an indepth study together with government agencies, including the State Health Department, before implementing the ruling.

Mohd Isa, who is also the State Religious Council chairman said it would be most beneficial for couples intending to marry and start a healthy family to have the tests done.

Negri Sembilan mufti Datuk Mohd Murtadza Ahmad, when contacted yesterday, said the move to screen Muslim couples for HIV/AIDS was timely as the number of HIV patients in the State was on the rise.

"We have on record about 4,000 men and 93 women who were tested positive for HIV. These are rather alarming figures."

Mohd Murtadza said that by making the HIV/AIDS blood tests compulsory, the council hoped to reduce the number of HIV cases in the State.

Other States, however, were cautious about following Johor which will implement a fatwa requiring couples wishing to marry to undergo blood tests on Nov 13, to coincide with World AIDS Day.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman on Sunday confirmed the intended implementation of the fatwa in the State.

The ruling will involve all who wish to marry a Johor Muslim irrespective of whether he or she is from another State. It will also apply to non-Muslims converting to Islam to marry a Muslim from the State.

Under the ruling, couples wanting to get married have to undergo the HIV test, the results of which must be handed to the kadi before the wedding.

Couples who are certified medically fit and healthy will be issued a certificate and their marriage can then be solemnised.

If either the man or women is tested positive, he or she has to undergo three months of counselling and medical treatment.

The spouse-to-be will be informed about his or her would-be-spouse's HIV infection after which it will be left to both of them to decide if they still wanted to proceed with the marriage.

In Muar, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said his ministry was still studying the Johor Government's fatwa.

"I am still waiting for more information on the matter. Since this is an issue concerning a fatwa, I think it's better for me to get all the facts before making a statement on it," he said.

Chua was speaking to reporters after attending the launching of the National Adolescent Health Policy at the Bandar Penawar multi-purpose hall near here yesterday.

Chua, however, praised the "good intention" behind the State Government's ruling which was to protect the future generation from being infected with HIV which causes the deadly AIDS disease.

Meanwhile, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said she was disappointed with Johor's move, adding that flaws in its implementation by the State Health Department would render the objectives of the fatwa unachievable.

"During our meeting with the Johor Religious Department on Oct 17, we found that we share the same intentions in wanting to protect Malaysians

from HIV/AIDS.

"However, we find that many practical issues in the implementation of the fatwa need to be scrutinised by the State Health Department," she said after a Press conference on the council's plan to send religious leaders on a study tour of Uganda here yesterday.

Marina also questioned if Johor was prepared for the immense task of carrying out pre-test and post-test counselling for the couples.

She urged the Johor Religious Department to review these issues before implementing the fatwa so that its intention to protect people, especially women, from becoming infected will be fulfilled.

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