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A million tested for HIV/AIDS yearly

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Over a million Malaysians are tested for HIV/AIDS yearly as a move to monitor and prevent the spread of the disease, said Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Ming.

"Blood tests to identify HIV/AIDS positive victims are not confined to prisoners and those in dadah rehabilitation centres only.

"Medical workers, non-governmental organisation volunteers and private companies' staff too are tested randomly," he said to reporters yesterday after visiting victims of Sunday's Kuala Lipis road crash undergoing treatment at Kuala Lumpur Hospital.

Yesterday, Malaysia AIDS Council chairman Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir called for a National Strategic Plan to fight the increasing number of HIV/AIDS cases in the country.

She also called for ministries to set up a HIV/AIDS unit, like in Thailand, to create greater awareness of the diseases among people and those suffering from it.

Commenting on Marina's statement, Chua said he welcomed her sentiments, adding, an annual session on HIV/AIDS awareness with the Government and the private sector staff was a more feasible move.

"HIV/AIDs units should not be set up just in ministries; we encourage the public and the private sector to also create awareness of HIV/AIDS."

He said speakers could be invited from the Health Ministry, Human Resource Ministry, Malaysian AIDS Council and NGOs.

"No government can be complacent, all should be alert to undertake effective education policy, preventive measures and treatment in all pandemics," he said.

Chua said 7,218 more HIV/AIDS cases were discovered last year due to the intensive surveillance and increased tests on the population including prisons and the dadah rehabilitation centre.

"It is only natural that when more tests are conducted, we get more cases," he said.