

Schools to introduce sex education
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Deputy education minister said Thursday sex education would be taught in schools across the conservative Muslim-majority country next year, to tackle an epidemic of "baby-dumping".

Wee Ka Siong told AFP the classes, which would be called "social and reproductive-health education," would be introduced at all secondary schools in January 2011 as part of the curriculum.

"We must fight this problem of unwanted pregnancies, baby-dumping, among teenagers and promiscuity," Wee said.

He added that "this can only be done through education, by giving boys and girls enough information so they can make the right decision.

"This course is not to sensationalise sex or promote promiscuity. The classes starting in January 2011 will give students information on what they are going through in terms of puberty and adolescence so that they don't end up getting pregnant or becoming promiscuous."

Last month, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said the classes were being considered as part of a plan to curb baby-dumping, in which babies have been left to die in toilets and on garbage dumps.

Giving birth out of wedlock carries a strong social stigma in Malaysia, a multicultural society embracing Muslim Malays as well as ethnic Chinese and Indian communities.

In 2009 there were 79 cases of baby-dumping but as of mid-September this year there had already been about 70, sparking alarm among authorities and in the community.

Malaysia's first school for pregnant teenagers, an initiative directly aimed at curbing the rising numbers of abandoned babies, opened in September in central Malacca state.

In May, the nation's first "baby hatch" centre for rescuing unwanted newborns was introduced in the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

The centre, modelled on similar services in Germany, Japan and Pakistan, allows mothers to leave their babies anonymously.

- AFP