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Carefree and ignorant

Groups say good values and education will help reduce HIV and AIDS cases among young Malaysians

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THE carefree attitude of the younger generation towards unprotected sex has led to the rise of HIV and AIDS cases in the country.

Non-governmental organisations say the serious lack of knowledge by the public and minimal or no support from loved ones added to the problem.

The Malay Mail yesterday highlighted the worrying trend of young Malaysians, aged between 20 and 39, who form the largest segment of those infected by HIV.

Deputy Education Minister II P. Kamalanathan said the problem needed the participation of all levels of society.

"Spiritual and religious values will help combat the disease, so parents should educate their

children on the pitfalls of HIV and AIDS," he said.

He said the ministry was raising awareness about the disease among students.

Pink Triangle Foundation (PTF) acting executive director Raymond Tai said the number of infected students had been rising and "we have been fighting the issue for two years".

He said sexual intercourse had overtaken the sharing of needles as the No 1 reason for the spread of HIV and AIDS.

He said the issue could not be tackled through morality alone as it would not stop people from having premarital sex without protection.

Tai said sex education should begin in primary school.

"It should be done with vary-

ing content so that by the time they are Form Three students, they would be comfortable talking about sex," he said.

Federation of Reproductive Health Associations official Lim Hwei Mian said the lack of sex education in schools could be a contributory factor to the rise in cases.

She said comprehensive sex education must be offered early.

The Malay Mail had reported that the number of students contracting HIV and AIDS was worrying as one in four cases involved students aged between 13 and 29.

High-risk sexual practices were cited as the main cause and last year a record 170 students contracted HIV while 16 had AIDS.