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# WHO warns of a growing male AIDS crisis

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The World Health Organisation has warned that the HIV/AIDS epidemic may take a turn for the worse in Asia unless countries urgently expand access to health services for men who have sex with men.

WHO regional adviser on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection Dr Massimo Ghidinelli said evidence showed that unprotected male-to-male sex was again fuelling the spread of the disease.

"Studies show that at present, the proportion of HIV infections

being transmitted among men who have sex with men is larger and more significant than we had originally believed," he said in a statement.

This re-emerging mode of transmission has prompted WHO's Regional Office for the Western Pacific, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, and the Hong Kong Department of Health, to call for swift action to address this growing health crisis.

The organisers have started meeting with HIV/AIDS specialists from Asian governments, regional experts and representatives from non-governmental organisations

since yesterday to discuss strategies to deliver better services to MSM communities.

Countries participating in the conference in Hong Kong are Australia, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Hong Kong, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

Dr Ghidinelli said strengthening surveillance and implementing effective interventions for HIV prevention and care among men having sex with men should be prioritised to prevent the further spread of the virus.

A review in December 2007 showed that in Cambodia and Vietnam, men who have sex with

men are more likely to contract HIV compared with the general population.

In China, the risk of infection by men who have sex with men is 45 times higher than for men in general. Asia is believed to have the world's largest number of men having sex with men, estimated at 10 million.

Dr Ghidinelli said the lack of better access to HIV/AIDS services can be traced to the stigma and discrimination associated with male-to-male sex, which is frowned upon in some societies, and to breaches of human rights, including the right to better health.