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More women with HIV puts children at risk

GEORGE TOWN: The number of women HIV patients rose by nearly 10 per cent since 2000 with the chances of transmission to children increasing, Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said yesterday.

He said good ante-natal screening for mothers and the treatment of all HIV-positive mothers with anti-retroviral drugs had prevented more children from contracting HIV.

"However, when more women become infected, there is a danger of transmission from mother to child increasing," he said at the launching of the national conference on HIV/AIDS in conjunction with the World AIDS Day at a hotel in Batu Feringhi.

Liow said a good way of curbing the increasing "feminisa-

tion" of the HIV-AIDs epidemic was to ensure that women and their spouse or sexual partners said no to unsafe sex.

He, however, added that this was easier said than done for most women, especially in societies where men were dominant decision-makers.

"Men will, therefore, need to give their strong support, co-operation and understanding towards saying no to unsafe sex."

Liow said sexual transmission of HIV had also increased by nearly 10 per cent from 18.9 per cent in 2000 to 29.8 per cent last year.

Over the same period, the percentage of women victims among HIV reported cases had increased from 9.4 per cent to 19.1 per cent.