

Headline **When the woman says 'no', obey**  
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# When the woman says 'no', obey

The number of new HIV cases reported in Malaysia peaked in 2002 at 6,978; a 'notification rate' of 28.5 per 100,000 population. That rate has dropped every year since but the number of women infected is rising, ANNIE FREEDA CRUEZ reports

THE Health Ministry aims to reduce the number of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) cases to 11 per 100,000 population this year.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai says statistics indicate that Malaysia may achieve the target by the end of the year.

This, he says, will mean that the government is well on its way to achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of "halting and reversing the spread of HIV by 2015".

Liow, nonetheless, expresses concern over an increasing trend in infections through the "sexual route" and the increasing notification rate of the disease among women.

Sexual transmission increased from 18.9 per cent in 2000 to 29.8 per cent in 2008, while the notification rate among women also soared from 9.4 per cent in 2000 to 19.1 per cent in 2008.

"When women become increasingly infected, there is a danger of rising vertical transmission as well, that is, from mother to child," says Liow.

Fortunately, he adds, the vertical transmission has been capped at 1.5 per cent of all cases each year.

He attributes this to the ministry's screening programme for antenatal mothers and the treatment of HIV-positive mothers with anti-retroviral drugs.

Liow says one way to curb the increasing "feminisation" of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is to ensure that women and their spouses or sexual partners can effectively say "no" to unsafe sex.

"This may be easier said than done for most women, especially in societies where men are the decision-makers. Men, therefore, need to give their strong support and cooperation on this."

Touching on drug addicts, Liow says statistics from the

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National Anti-Dadah Agency reveal that there were 221,188 addicts, including 4,004 women, between 2001 and last year.

Of 217,184 male drug addicts identified, 108,409 were new cases while the rest were relapse cases.

As for women drug addicts, 2,791 were new drug users.

Liow said the number of new and repeat drug addicts

was declining steadily.

Citing an example, he said, there were 15,440 new male drug addicts identified in 2001, followed by 16,839 in 2002, 19,799 (2003), 19,317 (2004), 14,910 (2005), 10,067 (2006), 5,619 (2007), 5,736 (2008) and 682 last year.

Similarly on repeat cases in men, he says, there were 15,584 in 2001, 14,653 (2002), 16,618 (2003), 18,663

(2004), 17,231 (2005), 12,281 (2006), 6,815 (2007), 6,340 (2008) and 590 last year.

“There is a similar declining trend in women drug addicts. This is a good sign and the authorities concerned are trying to reduce the number through various activities and campaigns.”

The majority of them were aged between 19 and 39 although there were some aged between 13 and 18.



Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai voices concern over an increasing trend in infections through the 'sexual route'