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When the child comes first

Annie Freeda Cruz

KUALA LUMPUR: The prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programme in Malaysia is based on anti-retroviral prophylaxis (preventive medicine) for the child, safer delivery and infant feeding practices.

It also tests for HIV during the mother's antenatal period.

Although it covers only women receiving antenatal care at government facilities, it is estimated that more than 70 per cent of the total antenatal mothers nationwide were found to utilise government antenatal facilities.

Coverage of these mothers through the public facilities improved from 49.7 per cent in 1998 to 99 per cent last year.

Antenatal HIV cases from the private sector were also referred to the government medical system.

Between the first detected case in 1986 and end 2008, 84,630 men, women and children have been notified as infected with HIV in Malaysia; while 11,234 have died of AIDS.

While Malaysia's epidemic is

largely dominated by injecting drug users who make up about 57 per cent of new total cases in 2008, there is concern, however, that heterosexual transmission is on the rise.

In 2008, 27 per cent of new reported HIV cases were attributed to heterosexual intercourse. In 2004, it was 20 per cent.

The proportion of women reported with HIV has also increased dramatically in the last decade, from just four per cent of new cases in

1995 to 19 per cent of new cases in 2008.

The Health Ministry data show that in 2008, more housewives tested HIV-positive than sex workers, with a ratio of one sex worker for every five housewives.

The percentage of babies born with HIV remains at relatively low levels — around 1.4 per cent of new

cases in recent years — partly as a result of a government-sponsored prevention programme for pregnant women called Resources on AIDS.



Sister Rusnah, a health ministry nurse, checking on a baby who was born HIV-negative to a HIV-positive woman.