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China warns gay transmission of AIDS gaining pace

BEIJING: China warned in a notice for Tuesday's World AIDS Day that homosexual transmission of the disease was gaining pace and called for health authorities nation-wide to step up prevention work.

The statement by the health ministry came a day after President Hu Jintao called on the nation's people not to discriminate against those with HIV in comments widely broadcast by the nation's government-controlled media.

"Sexual contact continues to be the main channel of transmission with the speed of homosexual transmission clearly increasing," the health ministry said.

"This is a new situation that we need to pay attention to."

China has not been hit as hard by HIV/AIDS as many other nations.

The disease first gained hold in China among illegal drug users, ethnic minorities, sex workers, and through unsanitary blood transfusions. But in recent years, transmission avenues have expanded out from those traditionally high-risk groups, the ministry said.

"The AIDS epidemic has already spread from high-risk groups to ordi-

nary people, dangerous elements of AIDS transmission are present everywhere," it said.

"AIDS is affecting more and more people and the transmission is becoming more diverse."

The ministry urged stepped-up education efforts on safe sex and condom use. By the end of October 2009, China had 319,877 registered cases of HIV/AIDS, including 48,000 new cases this year, while nearly 50,000 people have died in China to AIDS, the ministry said.

The ministry has estimated that up to 740,000 people in China live with HIV, many of whom experience high levels of stigma and discrimination, a situation President Hu addressed at an AIDS awareness activity in Beijing Monday.

You "must care more and better for AIDS patients and people living with HIV, and in particular guide society into not discriminating against them," the president told AIDS prevention volunteers.

"We welcome the positive attitude of Chinese leaders on the fight against AIDS," prominent AIDS activist Wan Yanhai and director of the AIDS Action Project told AFP.— AFP