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Renew zeal to stop AIDS — Liow

PUTRAJAYA: The government has called on all parties to be dedicated in eradicating AIDS and to simultaneously renew and strengthen their earlier commitment to handle the HIV/AIDS epidemic, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.

He said the government was committed to provide equal and comprehensive easy access to prevention, treatment, care and support and protect the rights of individuals and would ensure its agenda to eradicate the epidemic was continued.

"HIV/AIDS has plagued the world for 30 years now. Malaysia detected its first HIV infection in 1986 and as of September 2011, we've recorded 93,827 cases," he said.

"Of the total, 17,232 (18.4 percent) were AIDS patients and 14,804 (15.8 percent) HIV/AIDS related deaths," he said in his speech for World Aids Day, themed Getting to Zero - Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS Related Deaths 2011-2015 yesterday.

Malaysia further chose the slogan 'Towards Eliminating Vertical Transmission', which



Liow

is in-vitro transmission from mother to child, as a parallel to the global theme, he added.

Liow said the government has reiterated its commitment to handle HIV/AIDS and to ensure the most-at-risk-populations received due attention.

He emphasised that the authorities took the issue of vertical transmission seriously and would ensure such infections can be fully prevented by 2015.

Efforts to deal with the epidemic would be carried out through the National Strategic Plan 2011-2015,

he asserted.

He noted that the highest number of new HIV cases was recorded in 2002, which was 6,978 or 28.5 per 100,000 population and the government had aimed to reduce the rate to 11 per 100,000 by 2015.

"Overall steps taken to prevent infections reduced the number of new cases to 6,756 starting 2003 and the decrease has been consistent," he informed.

"Last year, 3,652 new HIV cases were detected with a rate of 12.6 per 100,000 population. And for the first nine months of this year it was 2,465 cases," said Liow.

Liow further remarked, with a 3,286 or 11.5 per 100,000 projection for the whole of this year, there was a big possibility of the 2015 target being achieved earlier.

He urged private facilities which were yet to screen pregnant women for HIV, to start doing so.

He said since screening was started in 1997 the rate of pregnant women detected with HIV was low, between 0.02 and 0.05 percent, whereas babies infected through vertical transmission was three percent, compared to between 30 and 45 percent previously. - Bernama