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# Govt preventive measures have reduced new HIV cases: Rosnah

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SANDAKAN: The HIV and AIDS scourge which swept the world since 30 years ago until now have taken the lives of almost 30 million people infected by the disease. Currently there are about 34 million more people who are suffering from the infection throughout the world.

Deputy Health Minister, Datuk Rosnah Hj Abdul Rashid Shirlin, said Malaysia's first cases of HIV infection was detected in 1986 and up until September this year, 93,827 cases have been detected in the country.

She said, from the breakdown of the total cases, 17,232 or 18.4 percent are AIDS infected patients and 14,804 are deaths related to HIV and AIDS infection.

She disclosed that the highest incidences of new HIV cases were reported in 2002, where there were 6,978 cases or 28.5 per cent per 100,000 people.

"The Government has already targeted to reduce the

incidences of new HIV cases to 11 per 100,000 people by 2015. Through preventative measures that have been implemented holistically, the government has finally succeeded in reducing significantly new cases of this infection," she said.

Rosnah was speaking during the opening of the national level World AIDS Day 2011 at SM Yu Yuan Hall, here, on Friday. The text of her speech was delivered by Deputy Director General of Health (Public Health), Dr. Lokman Hakim Sulaiman.

This year's theme is "Towards Zero" with the slogan "Through Vertical Transmission Elimination".

According to the Deputy Minister of Health, from the year 2003 onwards, new HIV cases has decreased to 6,756 cases thereby showing a consistent decrease and for the year 2010, a total of 3,652 new HIV cases were detected or 12.6 percent per 100,000 people.

She added that for the first nine months of this year alone, a total of 2,465 new HIV cases have been reported, and if everything goes according to pro-

jection, the number of HIV cases for the year would be 3,286 cases or nine cases per day or 11.5 per cent rate per 100,000 people.

"It looks very likely that the target for the year 2015 could be achieved earlier. The decline in new HIV cases significantly proves that government's efforts to combat the epidemic was successful and has become a model for other countries in their effort to combat HIV and AIDS. To date, nearly 25 countries has made a working visit here to learn how we implement prevention and control of HIV in this country, and they have nothing but praises for the steps we have taken," she said.

In the meantime, she said, the government through the Ministry of Health Malaysia has been and will be working to provide ARV treatment through hospitals and government health clinics.

Hence, at the end of last year, 13,981 people had received and will be receiving ARV treatment which will cost RM32.5 million.

According to her, it is expected that by the end of this

year, about 15,000 people will be given ARV treatment or 'antiretroviral' treatment. Her ministry will also be updating the treatment guidelines according to current 2010 WHO guidelines by providing ARV treatment to those CD4 patients with less than 350 cells/mm.

"Through these new criteria, more HIV patients will benefit from it. With the best ARV treatment at this time, the lives of HIV patients will be more meaningful and their life expectancy would be longer than expected than without treatment.

"Thus, for patients infected with HIV should always take care and try not to infect others.

This practice is a commendable step and should be practised at all times," she said.

She added that the main contributor to HIV infection and AIDS are caused by activities such as sharing needles contaminated with HIV virus, through sexual contact with infected people, free sex with someone of unknown health status and the HIV-infected mother to her child.

In this regard, she said, the role of combating HIV and AIDS should not be implemented by the government alone but requires the cooperation of all parties whether non-governmental organizations or NGOs, communities and individuals.

She hoped the role of NGOs would be expanded not only in the big cities but also in every corner of the state.

Rosnah disclosed that in Sandakan, NGOs such as the Sandakan AIDS Support Group Association, or better known as SAGA, is already in existence where they can provide help to groups at risk of HIV infection.

"I would like to congratulate SAGA President, Dr. Zaiton Yahya, who is also a family physician in the Sandakan Health Clinic, to have pioneered the association and thus help the people from the effects of the infection," she said.

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**HAPPY CELEBRATION ... Dr. Lokman Hakim Sulaiman (sitting, centre) with invited guests and the audience during World AIDS Day 2011 at Sandakan.**