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Towards zero HIV by 2020

BY DARYLL LAW

KUCHING: The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS or UNAIDS has announced that the fast approach in the next five years will allowed the world to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

A recent report by UNAIDS "Fast Track: Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030" outlined that by adopting the fast approach, nearly 28 million new HIV cases and 21 million AIDS-related deaths would be prevented by 2030.

To achieve this, 90-90-90 approach must be achieved 10 years earlier, by 2020. The 90-90-90 approach means 90 per cent of people living with HIV know their HIV status, 90 per cent of HIV positive receiving treatment and 90 per cent of those receiving treatment having adequate suppression of HIV virus.

Assistant Minister of Public Health Datuk Dr Jerip Susil said to achieve these targets, continued efforts would be needed to identify and bridge gaps that hindered the provision of effective treatment among all ages.

Other targets include reducing the annual number of new HIV cases by more than 75 per cent and to achieve zero discrimination.

Hence, by end of 2014, nearly 28 years of the HIV epidemic and since the first infection reported in the state in 1989, the number of cases is still growing.

"Up to November 2014, of the total of 1,924 cases of HIV infection and 448 HIV/AIDS related deaths have been reported, bringing the number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to 1,476

people.

"From January to November this year, 211 new cases of HIV infection were reported in the state. Based on this, the rate of new cases of HIV infection is 8.09 per 100,000 people. Although this rate is much lower than the national target of 11.0 per 100,000 people, the rate shows an upward trend each year," said Dr Jerip when officiating at the state level World AIDS Day 2014 in conjunction with the launching of 'Kuching Healthy City, Getting to Zero HIV by the year 2020' at Medan Niaga Satok here, yesterday.

He pointed out that of the total HIV cases reported between January to November this year, majority or 65.88 per cent were by the indigenous people, Chinese (17.53%), Malay (9.95%) and foreigners (6.64%).

By age groups, 178 cases or 84.4 per cent were contracted by those in the 20-49 year group, 24 cases or 11.37 per cent by those aged 50 years and above, eight cases or 3.8 per cent (13-19 years) and one case involved a 12-year-old.

Dr Jerip said the most important source of infection was through sexual intercourse, which contributed to 198 cases (93.8%) of new HIV infection.

"Various efforts have been undertaken by the government to address HIV infection and AIDS disease since 1988 and the efforts include scope of case detection, prevention, treatment and social support.

"The government has provided all facilities for screening at Health Clinics and govern-

ment hospitals. These services are provided free of charge. It also includes pre-marital screening test, HIV testing for pregnant women, testing for HIV patients' contacts and others. It is extremely important, especially those who have undergone life at risk of HIV infection to know their HIV status through these tests," he said.

Dr Jerip said that to produce a generation free of HIV infection, Prevention of Maternal to Child Transmission (PMTCT) had been introduced.

This programme includes HIV screening for mothers during pregnancy, treatment with anti-retroviral drugs (ARV) for infected mothers, anti-retroviral treatment and HIV testing for infants born to infected mothers.

The governments also introduced a programme of infant formula milk for free for two years for mothers tested positive for HIV. This is intended to prevent infected mothers from passing HIV to their babies.

"With this programme, we can reduce the transmission rate to less than two per cent from 30 per cent if there is no indication of intervention," said Dr Jerip.

Also present were State Director of Health Datuk Dr Zulkifli Jantan, DBKU Mayor Datuk Haji Abang Abdul Wahap Abang Julai, MBKS Deputy mayor Abang Affendi Abang Annuar, Healthy City Consultant Dr Andrew Kiyu, Kuching Health Officer Dr Kamarudin Lajim and Deputy Director of State Planning Unit Buckland Bangik.

