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More women have HIV

Most contract disease from husbands and boyfriends

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KUALA LUMPUR: More Malaysian women are being infected with HIV, with most of them contracting the virus from their husbands or boyfriends.

Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Senator Heng Seai Kie said although the total number of HIV cases in the country had declined over the past five years, the number of women and young girls infected had risen from 4% in 1995 to 18% by the end of last year.

"Most were housewives. In Asia, 25% to 40% of newly infected women and girls contracted the disease from their husbands or boyfriends.

"The data we have in Malaysia shows that this is already happening in Kelantan, Sabah, Sarawak, Kedah and Johor," she said at the launch of the *State of the Malaysia HIV and AIDS Epidemic 2010* conference here yesterday.

Her speech was read out by National Population and Family and Community Development director-general Datuk Aminah Abdul Rahman.

Quoting the 2008 report by the Commission on AIDS in Asia, Heng also expressed concern that men who were infected through drug use and unprotected sexual intercourse with sex workers would infect more women in the future.

"It is no longer just people who inject drugs and sell sex who are at risk of HIV infection. Ignorance and apathy put us all at risk," she said.

Heng added that the ministry had set up centres such as the Pusat Bantuan Khidmat Sosial and Rumah Nur Salam in Chow Kit.

"We should open our doors to vulnerable young people in need of sexual reproductive health services and guidance," she said, adding that the ministry had allocated RM50mil to establish shelter homes for people living with HIV nationwide.

She also called on parents, teachers and students to support the implementation of the Reproductive Health and Social Education syllabus, which would be introduced in

schools nationwide next year.

"It will enable our youths to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse and sexually-transmitted infections."

According to a report by the United Nations on Malaysia, 79,619 men and 8,091 women in the country were infected with HIV between 1986 and 2009.

Johor recorded the highest number of people infected with the disease at 14,600 cases, followed by Selangor and Kelantan with 11,859 and 9,891 respectively.

Intravenous drug use was the main reason for HIV infection, responsible for 61,943 out of the total 87,710 cases.

There were 99 cases of infants below the age of two years infected with the disease in the past 23 years while those in the 30 to 39 age group were at the highest risk - with 37,709 cases.

The report also said Malays had the highest number of infections at 62,953 cases, followed by the Chinese at 12,687 cases and the Indians at 6,929 cases.



Creating awareness: Launching the conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday are (from left) United Nations Theme Group on HIV chairman Dr Corinne Capuano, Aminah and Health Ministry Disease Control Division senior principal assistant director Dr Mohd Nasir Abdul Aziz.