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Awareness of STD in school

Fatimah: Move crucial in view of rising number of teenagers contracting the disease

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KUCHING: Welfare, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Fatimah Abdullah wants the Health Ministry to conduct a programme to raise awareness of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) in schools.

This is because there is an increasing number of teenagers getting STD such as syphilis and gonorrhoea in the state, according to the minister.

According to statistics from the Health Department, 43 teenagers between 13 and 19 years old in Kuching Division alone were reported to be infected with syphilis and gonorrhoea last year.

"These teenagers are still in school and if they have syphilis and gonorrhoea, this will affect their health and academic performance. The figure is on the rise and this is a worrying trend," said Fatimah, who also oversees education matters in the state.

"And if the situation warrants us to find out the root cause — when, where and how they got STD — my ministry can work together with the Health Ministry and National Population and Family Development Board's (LPPKN),"

she told reporters here yesterday.

Fatimah welcomed Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai's recent announcement to extend the Healthy Mind Screening Programme to all schools this year as a way to address rising number of children and adolescents facing mental stress.

"We hope the programme can also incorporate talks on STD and ways to lead a healthy life," she added.

Fatimah said it was both sad and worrying to know that more children and adolescents nationwide were suffering from mental health, particularly stress, even causing some to commit suicide.

According to National Health Morbidity Survey in 2006, 20.3% of children and adolescents were suffering from mental stress, while 11.2% of adults were inflicted with the same problem.

Last year, the number of cases had risen to about 12% in adults while children recorded a slight increase, she said.

"According to the survey, suicidal tendencies among youth aged between 16 and 24 were also at a worrying level of 20% in 2006. This had also increased," she pointed out.



Soothing words: Fatimah comforting Mohd Imran Haziq, 9 (left) and Mohd Aniq Haziq, 8, while their mother Ramlah Mat, 35, looked on during a visit to the family of late Faizal Mahidin at Kenyalang Park in Kuching yesterday. — ANDRE OLIVEIRO / The Star