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HIV mostly spread through heterosexual relations

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PUTRAJAYA: At present, 70% of AIDS and HIV positive cases are transmitted through heterosexual relationships, mainly from female sex workers to male clients, says the Health Ministry.

"The biggest cause of AIDS cases used to be intravenous drug users, but we have managed to control that through our harm reduction programmes.

"Now it is caused by males who visit sex workers, whether locally or

abroad, and have unprotected sex. "From there, they pass it on to their wives or partners. This figure is on the rise," said Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam.

He added that the Government was committed towards supporting a United Nations political declaration to see the end of the HIV and AIDS epidemic by 2030.

"We initially targetted to see the number of new HIV cases reduced from 21.7 cases per 100,000 population in 2000 to 11.0/100,000 in 2015.

"But we did better and reduced it to 10.9/100,000. We aim to ensure

that we reach 0 cases even before 2030," he said at a press conference at the ministry here.

Dr Subramaniam said the ministry had identified four high-risk groups as the "key population", namely intravenous drug users, female sex workers, transgenders and homosexual men.

"To help achieve our aim by 2030, we must increase the prevention programmes among these key populations, increase access to treatment and provide screenings.

"We also have a good relationship with non-government organisa-

tions which we know work closely with these key populations and they will help with our harm reduction programmes," he said.

The minister said HIV screenings had also been expanded to 1Malaysia Clinics, besides hospitals and health clinics.

"On average, we conduct about 1.2 million HIV screenings annually," he added.

On another matter, Dr Subramaniam said the ministry was still waiting for a complete report from the World Health Organisation on a dengue vaccine before it could be

implemented in Malaysia.

"While we recognise that the vaccine does some good, we are also concerned about some potential problems and unanswered questions on the vaccine.

"Until we are clear on these areas, it will be difficult for us to make a decision on whether to use it nationwide.

"WHO has come up with an initial statement recommending the usage of the vaccine but with plenty of caution, so we will wait for the complete report which is expected next month," he said.