

Headline	New HIV infections in M`sia declining		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	14 Sep 2017	Color	Full Color
Section	Nation	Circulation	338,368
Page No	16	Readership	1,032,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	198 cm ²
Journalist	Sharon Ling	AdValue	RM 9,965
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 29,895



New HIV infections in M'sia declining

Nation recorded a 34% decrease in the last six years, says UNAIDS

By SHARON LING

sharonling@thestar.com.my

KUCHING: Malaysia is achieving high levels of reduction in HIV infections and testing those with the virus, but needs to increase the number of HIV-diagnosed people on treatment.

United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) regional director for Asia and the Pacific Eamonn Murphy said Malaysia recorded a 34% decline in new HIV infections in the last six years, higher than the regional average of 13%.

Murphy also said about 95% of people living with HIV in Malaysia had been tested and knew their status.

"It's important for people to know their HIV status because even if you're not accessing treatment, you can prevent further transmission," Murphy said in an interview.

However, he said only about 37% of HIV-positive people in Malaysia are on treatment.

"Fear is often the barrier to going into treatment. The fear might be that people in their workplace might discriminate against them or that they might lose their jobs. Unfortunately, the discrimination comes about because the community doesn't understand that HIV is a treatable condition.

"Sometimes it might be other factors in the person's life. Maybe there's an issue with drugs and the instability that can come with that,"

said Murphy, who was here for the 5th Asia-Pacific Conference on Public Health which ended yesterday.

He said changing the public's understanding of HIV was the first step towards addressing the challenge of getting people into treatment.

Murphy added that those on treatment could live a normal lifespan as anti-retroviral therapy was effective in suppressing the virus.

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