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Council: HIV cases decline rates static

'Unprotected sex among young M'sians could be possible cause'

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia had been able to halve the annual number of new HIV cases thanks to intervention programmes but rates of decline have stagnated, said Malaysian AIDS Council honorary secretary Hisham Hussein.

He pointed out that there were 6,900 new cases in 2002 compared with 3,400 currently.

The Health Ministry had targeted to reduce HIV cases to 10 per 100,000 and this had been achieved, he said.

"But we are concerned that in the last five years, the average 3,300 to 3,500 new infections per year, which seem good, have plateaued. We want it to go down," he said in an interview.

Hisham said unprotected sex among young Malaysians could be the possible cause.

In a newly released report by the United Nations, Malaysia is one of the 10 countries which together accounted for over 95% of all new HIV infections in the Asia-Pacific region in 2016.

The "Ending AIDS: Progress Towards the 90-90 Targets" report said the other nine countries in Asia were India, China, Indonesia,

Pakistan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand.

It also contained an extensive analysis of the targets set for 2020 when 90% of all HIV-infected people should know their status, 90% of all HIV-diagnosed people should be able to access anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and 90% of those taking ART have virally suppressed HIV.

From 1986 until last year, a total of 108,519 HIV cases had been reported, according to MAC.

"We have done wonders with the syringe exchange programme with the numbers steadily going down year by year.

"However, cases from sexual transmission has gradually crept up and grown exponentially," he said, adding that the infections were from both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

Last year, 1,356 new HIV cases reported were those aged 20 to 29 and 103 were aged 13 to 19, he said.

There were 1,066 and 75 cases respectively in 2013 and the numbers had gradually increased, he said.

"It is a whole spectrum that we need to look at and address," he said, adding that the young must be educated on this.