

135 youth HIV cases reported last year

KUALA LUMPUR: Of the 3,185 new HIV cases recorded last year, 4.2% or 135 cases involved adolescents aged between 10 and 19, says Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (*pic*).

He said the ministry has increased access to early HIV screening to encourage early detection

Among them is the HIV self-test alongside the TestNow website, which offers information on HIV, risk assessments and access to self-testing kits, which was launched in December 2023.

“As of June 2025, the platform has recorded 188,425 visitors, averaging 324 visitors daily, with 13.4% identified as having a high risk of HIV exposure.

“The ministry also extended the Differentiated HIV Services for Key Populations (DHSP) Model KK 2.0 to 33 government health clinics through strategic government-NGO partnerships.

“This aims to improve HIV service delivery for key populations, including at-risk youth,” he said in a written reply.

Dzulkefly said the ministry is improving preventive treatment and long-term care of HIV, including broadening access to preventive and therapeutic options.

“The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to curb HIV trans-



mission among young people, outline a series of immediate strategies centred on prevention education, early testing, access to treatment and nationwide efforts to eliminate stigma,” he said.

Dzulkefly was responding to Syerleena Abdul Rashid (PH-Bukit Bendera) who asked about the immediate strategies and policies to address the rise in HIV cases among Malaysian adolescents.

The minister said Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is provided to partners of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and high-risk individuals.

“When taken as prescribed, PrEP reduces the risk of HIV transmission by around 99% through sexual contact and 74% through needle sharing.

“Coverage of Antiretroviral (ARV) treatment continues to be expanded to ensure PLHIV can live healthy, normal lives,” he said.

Dzulkefly also stressed that combating HIV requires holistic cooperation across government agencies, NGOs, the private sector and community groups.

He said parents play an essential role in monitoring their children's wellbeing and ensuring at-risk adolescents receive appropriate healthcare.

Ministry has 53,185 medical officers

A TOTAL of 53,185 medical officers were serving under the Health Ministry as of June 30, comprising 39,310 permanent staff and 13,875 contract officers. Of this number, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said 33,182 or 62.4 per cent of medical officers were serving in public hospitals, including 21,977 permanent and 11,205 contract officers. This also included 6,715 specialists.

“There are also 15,274 permanent medical officers and 11,193 contract officers, totalling 26,467,” he said in a written parliamentary reply.



By JADE CHAN and AIDA AHMAD at Selangor State Assembly

Selangor schools hotspot for influenza infections

Exco member: State rolling out free vaccination drive for children

SELANGOR is grappling with a spike in influenza infections, recording 3,239 cases from 268 clusters cumulatively up to Oct 25.

A staggering 70.1% of the clusters were reported during the recent surge that began in late September.

Revealing the alarming figures, state public health and environment committee chairman Jamaliah Jamaluddin confirmed that educational institutions were at the epicentre of the outbreak.

“As much as 81% were from institutional clusters, the majority of which were educational institutions, while the remainder were private household outbreaks,” she said during the Selangor State Assembly sitting at Bangunan Dewan Negeri Selangor in Shah Alam yesterday.

She said this in reply to Chua Wei Kiat (PH-Rawang) who asked about the number of influenza cases and deaths in Selangor and if the state government's vaccination programme was provided free to high-risk groups.

Jamaliah said the severity of the situation was blurred because influenza was not a notifiable disease under Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 [Act 342].

While the Selangor Health Department received several reports of influenza-related deaths during the surge, she said official records showed that from 2024 to the end of Epidemiology Week 43/2025, no deaths from influenza had been confirmed.

Jamaliah said confirming an influenza death required a comprehensive autopsy.

She also said the state government had begun an influenza



Jamaliah: No deaths from influenza in Selangor.

vaccine immunisation programme for primary school pupils aged eight and below from the second week of November.

This, she added, was to ensure lessons were not disrupted.

Jamaliah said the move prioritised the four districts recording highest number of infections – Petaling, Klang, Gombak and Hulu Langat.

“The programme uses a two-pronged approach, featuring outreach efforts for Integrated Special Education Programme (PPKI) pupils and a walk-in system for others via selected Selcare panel clinics, coordinated through the Selangkah application,” she said.

Acknowledging the issue of “vaccine phobia” stemming from the post-Covid-19 era, which was raised by Chua, Jamaliah said the influenza vaccination was not mandatory and it required parental consent, either through the school or the Selangkah app.

“The programme is currently only the first phase, and its continuation into 2026 remains uncertain,” she said.

She added that Health



Selangor government has begun an influenza immunisation programme for primary school pupils. — Filepic

Ministry also provided 37,000 free doses of the vaccine via 82 government health facilities statewide to senior citizens with chronic illnesses.

On a brighter note, Jamaliah said dengue cases recorded in Selangor dropped by 64% this year, from 56,400 last year to 20,399 by Epidemiological Week 45 of 2025.

Six deaths were reported in 2025, down from 14 over the same period last year, she said, adding that the state government's continuous efforts had yielded positive results.

Responding to queries from Abbas Salimi Che Adzmi@Azmi (PH-Sri Serdang), Jamaliah however said the state would not let its guard down and would continue to take preventive measures.

“Selangor will channel an annual RM4mil for dengue control, with RM2.7mil allocated directly for local authorities to run community-based prevention programmes.”

This structure, she said, facilitated detailed, district-level action meetings to identify outbreak hotspots and deploy targeted, integrated vector management combining environmental, chemical and biological controls.

She added that Selangor was intensifying two key ground-level initiatives.

First is to expand the release of Wolbachia-bearing Aedes mosquitoes into two new high-risk localities in Petaling district, namely Pangsapuri Subang Hijauan and Pangsapuri Flora.

The Wolbachia bacteria prevents the transmission of the dengue virus, offering a strategic layer of protection.

Second will be increasing *gotong-royong* sessions in search-and-destroy exercises for mosquito breeding sites at hotspots.

Jamaliah said community empowerment remained central, and efforts would continue via programmes involving residents' associations, schools and religious institutions.

By ZALINA MORESON

PERIMENOPAUSE landed (maybe 30, 40, 50, but then, like 60?) she is asking.

"She says her symptoms started subtly and she had an overall feeling of 'not being myself'."

"It probably began when I was 44 and over the years more symptoms appeared - hot flashes, poor sleep, mood swings and irregular periods," she says.

"I didn't know what was happening or where to go for help," she recalls. "I thought I was just tired or stressed. It took me almost two years to connect the dots. By then I was already at a low point," she adds.

"The hardest part, for adults, was not knowing where to start, or even finding the right doctor to talk to."

"My obstetrician/gynaecologist had delivered my child 15 years earlier, but I didn't feel comfortable talking to him about menopause," she adds.

Dr. Sargent, who practices nutritional medicine with the knowledge he's changed and new science links really different. But how it was a few decades ago.

"Women are having children later - or not at all - and many women professionally active well into their 40s and 50s," she notes.

"This means they're navigating perimenopause while juggling careers, competing or even parenting teenagers."

Dr. Sargent. "The role of the heart and uterus in a woman's life is not culture, caring for children doesn't stop at 40 - we continue to carry them and emotions around us, but women reach post from an empty cup."

"This workbooks addresses, first, its ability to finally, radically different from those who came before."

"Most of our Greek neighbors had a different life, the average lifespan back then was also shorter. Our mothers' generation didn't talk about it, they endured. But now 3 women are different - we're read, curious and are determined to own our transition."

"We're the first generation that says, 'The shit going on just before I retire through this but I will find ways to make things better,'" she says.

More than relief

While public awareness is increasing, Dr. Sargent believes there's still a long way to go.

"Women today want more than just symptom relief - they want long-term health, energy and quality of life. The conversation has shifted from silence to empowerment, but workplace support, medical training and social work training still need to catch up," she adds.

Dr. Sargent's book is a first-of-its-kind and illustrative to help other women like Dr. Sargent. Menopause, a first-of-its-kind platform to support women through perimenopause and menopause.

"I did it not because I had the answers, but because I couldn't find them," she says. "I knew there must be other women like me, who instead of realising they're in perimenopause, start thinking they're 'going crazy'."

Making sense of menopause

Support and lifestyle changes can help women navigate this transitional period better.



Regular exercise combining cardio with strength or resistance training helps improve mood, brain health and sleep quality. — iStock



Menopause: A book is working with organisations to help create awareness and start educational programmes. — Menopause Asia

Menopause Asia is designed to be a "supportive place for women to learn, grow, proper self-care and feel seen again."

The platform offers a space for women to learn, connect with menopause-related doctors, and access wealth of resources (based on holistic, personalised care).

After all, according to Dr. Sargent - who is one of the platform's medical partners - menopause is still widely misunderstood and too often overlooked.

She says while perimenopause and menopause affect every woman differently, they come with common symptoms like irregular periods, hot flashes, sleep disturbances, mood swings, anxiety, brain fog and joint pain, which may overlap with other conditions like depression, hypothyroidism or stress-related burnout.

Dr. Sargent explains that the declining levels of oestrogen and progesterone during midlife profoundly impact the body, leading to these changes.

Noting a lack of emphasis on menopause in medical training, Dr. Sargent stresses, "We need to normalise the conversation and ensure healthcare professionals are better equipped to recognise and treat it."

For her, effective care goes beyond just symptoms relief; it integrates with lifestyle changes. "Lifestyle changes play a powerful role in helping women navigate the midlife transition smoothly," she adds.

She suggests women shift along a balanced, anti-inflammatory diet rich in whole foods, lean proteins and healthy fats, engage in regular exercise (including cardio with strength or resistance training to improve mood, bone health and sleep quality), and incorporate stress-management practices like yoga, deep breathing and meditation to reduce anxiety.

"These actions don't just ease symptoms, they support long-term health beyond the transition," she says.

For women in their 40s, Dr. Sargent advises proactive self-examination. "Start paying attention to your body - track your cycle, sleep, mood and energy levels. This awareness helps you notice changes earlier and seek support sooner."

Personalised care

He believes that there is no one-size-fits-all care "... because no two women are the same." The platform's approach begins with a 10-minute consultation, a departure from the standard, often hurried appointments common elsewhere.

"Our physicians are familiar with both menopause and female health, and they look at the whole individual, not just the symptoms," he notes.

Dr. Sargent agrees that tailoring menopause care to each woman is essential because "every woman's experience is different and we all cope uniquely."

Symptoms, health history, genetic predispositions, lifestyle choices, magnitude of body stress and personal preferences all vary," says Dr. Sargent. "A one-size-fits-all approach often falls short."

She explains that personalised care allows for more effective symptom management and better long-term health outcomes, while ensuring every woman feels supported in her unique experience and addressed during this period.

He adds the platform's care plans always focus heavily on supportive measures such as lifestyle, nutrition, movement and stress management.

She hopes Menopause Asia can play a larger role, changing the narrative from one of shame to confidence.

"When you cross an age, there's freedom and confidence that can be incredibly powerful but only if it's not around you making space for it," she says.

The platform is also working with organisations to help create awareness, start educational programmes and shape menopause-friendly policies.

"Women in midlife are often at the peak of their careers, raising 10 to 15 because of unrecognised symptoms," she points out. "If employers don't make these changes, they risk losing some of their best talent."

He says Menopause Asia to be the first place women turn to when they notice perimenopausal signs, to get clear answers, trusted doctors and a sense of belonging.

"My dream is for women to sit in this chapter, to own it as their story, season yet," he concludes.

Myths about menopause

Myth 1: It's only hot flashes.

Truth The impact is whole-body. While hot flashes and night sweats are common signs, menopause can cause sleep disruptions, mood changes, memory and focus, joint pain and vaginal dryness.

Myth 2: You must endure in silence.

Truth Women have access to effective management options, ranging from personalised lifestyle changes to modern hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Ignoring symptoms hinders long-term health and quality of life.

Myth 3: You're too young to have symptoms.

Truth Menopause (the last period typically happens around 51 years old, but the menopausal phase begins in your 40s or even late 30s). Changes like irregular periods, anxiety or sleep issues can appear earlier.

Source: Menopause Asia

Iconographics

Star Foundation

From Malaysians' hearts to Kedah teen's surgery

WHEN 15-year-old Chiet Ailai was wheeled into the operating theatre at Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) in September, his family waited anxiously outside, praying for the best.

For hours, his father and siblings held on to hope that the life-saving surgery in Kuala Lumpur would be successful.

Boy with rare heart condition gets second chance at life thanks to generosity of people around the country

When the doctors informed them that the operation had gone well, relief washed over the family.

"Grateful, relieved, happy, it was all mixed together," recalled his father Ailai Eperoi.

"After the long wait, we were just thankful to see him safe."

Born in Sik, Kedah, Chiet had faced health challenges from the very start.

Just six days after birth, he was diagnosed with Transposition of the Great Arteries (TGA), a rare congenital heart condition.

He then underwent a high-risk arterial switch operation in Penang, which allowed him to enjoy a childhood like other children.

The cheerful student of SMK Lubok Merbau in Pendang loves football and dreams of becoming a mechanical engineer.

In February this year, during a routine check-up at Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah in Alor Setar, doctors discovered that he was suffering from

severe supralvalvular neo-aortic stenosis, a dangerous narrowing of the aorta above the heart valve.

The news devastated Ailai, who earns about RM600 a month as a small-scale farmer.

Chiet's eldest brother, Somrath, 26, contributes RM500 from manual work, while their sister Junytaa, 22, stays home to care for Chiet.

Since their mother passed away in 2020, the siblings have relied heavily on one another.

The surgery required to save the teenager's life would cost RM80,000, far beyond what the family could afford.

Help arrived when Star Foundation, through its Medical Fund Programme, launched a campaign to raise RM50,000.

Another non-governmental organisation stepped in to contribute RM30,000.

Within days, Malaysians responded with compassion.

Donations big and small poured in and by mid-July, the target was achieved.

"The support from Star Foundation and the public means so much to us," said Junytaa.

"Not only did it help us financially, it also gave us the strength to keep going."

Speaking in a phone interview from home while recovering, Chiet expressed his gratitude for all the support.

"I am grateful that everything was made easier and that I am getting better," he said.

IJN senior consultant paediatric cardiothoracic surgeon Datuk Dr Ahmad Sallehuddin, who performed the surgery, said the procedure went smoothly.

"Chiet is expected to enjoy a much better quality of life," he said.

Today, the family has renewed hope.

"Our wish for him is that he will grow up healthy, strong and to continue chasing his dreams," said Junytaa.

"To everyone who donated, prayed or offered support, we are truly grateful."

Chiet has now gained a second chance at life – school, football and the dream of becoming an engineer.

Star Foundation is the charitable arm of Star Media Group.

Since 2016, its Medical Fund Programme has provided critical medical aid to underprivileged individuals suffering from chronic illnesses.

To learn more or to contribute, visit starfoundation.com.my or e-mail starfoundation@thestar.com.my

Chiet is recovering well after surgery at IJN in September.



Some men 'ashamed' to do cancer screening



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK - JAMES - 1837777

LATE nights, fast food, long working hours and little to no exercise have become a way of life for many men.

These habits are quietly shaping a worrying trend. According to the Malaysia National Cancer Registry Report 2017-2021, the lifetime risk of Malaysian men developing cancer has increased from one in 10 to one in eight, with colorectal, lung and prostate cancers leading the list.

While genetics play a role, lifestyle choices remain the strongest driver. Only about five to 10 per cent of cancers are hereditary, says Sunway Medical Centre Velocity (SMCV) consultant clinical oncologist Dr Hafizah Zaharah Ahmad. "That means for the majority, our daily habits, such as what we eat, how active we are and our commitment to health screenings can make the big difference," she says.

WHEN LIFESTYLE TAKES A TOLL

The pace of modern living often drives habits that quietly undermine long-term health.

Extended hours of sitting, reliance on processed foods and limited physi-

cal activity have become part of daily life for many men. Over time, this lack of movement contributes to obesity, which in turn promotes chronic inflammation and increases insulin levels in the body.

These changes can damage cells, disrupt hormone balance and create conditions that encourage tumour growth. At the same time, diets high in processed foods and saturated fats further elevate cancer risk, compounding the effects of physical inactivity.

These silent health patterns continue unchecked as men often dismiss early symptoms or assume they will resolve on their own. This reluctance to act early is often rooted in social stigma rather than lack of awareness.

Many men associate medical consultations with weakness or embarrassment, especially when it involves sensitive topics such as urinary issues or reproductive health.

SMCV consultant urologist Dr Goh Ching Hood says these perceptions have serious consequences.

Some men feel that seeking help makes them appear less capable or "not manly", so they ignore symp-

ptoms until they become too disruptive to manage, he says.

"By the time we see them, the disease is often already advanced, which limits treatment options and reduces the likelihood of a full recovery."

The long-term impact of this delay can be seen in the three cancers most common among Malaysian men — colorectal, lung and prostate. Colorectal cancer can start as a small growth called polyps in the lining of the colon, and over the course of five to 10 years, some polyps can turn cancerous.

Furthermore, diets lacking fibre, frequent intake of red and processed meat and limited physical activity increases this risk, but prevention is possible through regular screening and healthier eating.

Dr Hafizah says a colonoscopy can detect cancer at an early stage, significantly improving the outcome. She adds that while early screening is vital, prevention begins with dietary and lifestyle choices.

The same habits that harm digestive health also affect the lungs. Smoking, in particular, exposes the body to



Some men feel that seeking help makes them appear less capable or 'not manly', so they ignore symptoms until they become too disruptive to manage, says Sunway Medical Centre Velocity consultant urologist Dr Goh Ching Hood. **NEWS**

thousands of carcinogenic chemicals that damage DNA and trigger chronic inflammation. Over time, these changes increase the likelihood of lung cancer, which remains one of the deadliest cancers among men.

Many patients tend to dismiss early symptoms, such as cough or fatigue, until the disease has reached an advanced stage, with 95.4 per cent of lung cancer cases diagnosed late according to the Malaysia National Cancer Registry Report 2017-2021.

When it comes to prostate cancer, awareness remains low and many cases are only detected after symptoms appear.

Dr Goh says prostate cancer is more commonly diagnosed in men older than 50, and those taking testosterone supplements face a higher risk. "In the early stages, most patients remain asymptomatic and show symptoms only once the cancer has spread, often with bone pain or neurological symptoms."

Screening with the Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test helps iden-

MEN, TAKE CHARGE!

ALTHOUGH cancer risk rises with age, many of its causes are still within one's control. Prevention begins with small, sustainable habits.

- Maintain a balanced diet with more fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Cut back on processed and red meat
- Avoiding smoking
- Limit alcohol intake
- Exercise regularly
- Stay hydrated
- Sleep well
- Manage stress

tify a man's risk long before symptoms occur.

Dr Goh recommends annual PSA testing from age 50, or from age 40 for those with a family history, on testosterone supplements or carrying the BRCA2 gene.

He says while screening plays a vital role, early diagnosis and timely treatment remain the key to improving survival and quality of life, extending life expectancy by up to 15 years in about 95 per cent of early-detected cases.

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