



## AIDS awareness still low in Malaysia, says expert

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While AIDS-related deaths in the Asia-Pacific region have declined by nearly 40%, Malaysia recorded an increase of 20% in the number of deaths since 2005.

The lack of awareness and reluctance to get tested were among the factors contributing to the increase, said Universiti Malaya's Medical Faculty dean and Medicine and Infectious Diseases Professor Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman.

She said this today at the launch of [TemanTeman](#), a one-stop service centre providing comprehensive information related to HIV/AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases.

Last year, she said there were 3,393 new HIV cases reported in Malaysia – an average of nine cases per day – while there was an estimated 86,324 people living with HIV, which is about 0.44% of the total population.

However, the number is expected to increase to 91,733 in 2015.

Dr Adeeba said out of that figure, only 45% of HIV-infected people were receiving treatment.

"A fair proportion of them are unfortunately in prison or on the streets, and they are not coming forward for various reasons," she said.

"Many of the HIV-infected people only came for treatment when they were already at the advanced stage of the disease... and it makes it much more difficult for us to treat them," she said.

"We need to encourage them individually to come forward, and secondly our system has to be more receptive towards their needs," she said.

Meanwhile, project director Tarandeep Anand said the objective behind the launch of [TemanTeman](#), was to increase awareness about the epidemic and the importance of early HIV testing in Malaysia.

"We offer transparent information about tests, HIV, STIs, as well as the treatment and care services available in Malaysia," he said.

Tarandeep added that the collaboration with Universiti Malaya Medical Centre's (UMMC) Department of Infectious Diseases and Centre of Excellence for Research in AIDS (CERiA) will result in patients having access virtually on how HIV treatment is done

in Malaysia at tertiary referral hospitals.

"We also have new feature like 'Online Mapping System' for friendly HIV testing and treatment sites in the country.

"For instance, when they click one of the points on the map, a video will emerge and patients can see the possible doctors they are going to meet at the treatment sites," he said.

The project was previously launched in Indonesia in January last year. – November 25, 2014.

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