

# MMA: PrEP medicine should be accessible for HIV high-risk groups

By **Mohamed Basyir** - January 24, 2023 @ 7:20pm



*MMA president, Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai, said this would be in line with Malaysia's commitment to universal health coverage, where everyone has equal access to healthcare, including preventive care, and that no one should be left behind. - NSTP file pic*

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged the government to make pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medicine accessible to groups that have the highest risk of HIV infection.

Its president, Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai, said this would be in line with Malaysia's commitment to universal health coverage, where everyone has equal access to healthcare, including preventive care, and that no one should be left behind.

"With due respect to religious viewpoints expressed on the use of PrEP, the sole purpose of allowing people at highest risk of HIV infection access to PrEP is to prevent the spread of HIV in the population and save lives.

"The intended use of PrEP is to prevent HIV infections and the decision to allow high-risk groups access to it has to be a decision based on scientific evidence to achieve the best possible outcomes for the community," he said in a statement today.

According to the Health Ministry's Disease Control Division's report, "Global AIDS Monitoring –Country Progress Report (Malaysia) 2022, (Overview of HIV epidemic, Malaysia 2021)", the cumulative number of reported HIV cases was at 128,638, while the number of reported new HIV infections was at 2,760.

The total number of people living with HIV (surveillance data) was at 67,822 and he said MMA estimated cases to be much higher as the rate of testing was low.

Due to high numbers of HIV infections reported, he said there should be a more effective national prevention strategy, which includes PrEP medication.

He said other countries have included PrEP as part of their national strategy to prevent the spread of HIV, and some countries have recently launched a pilot project.

For instance, in Thailand, he said PrEP was first introduced by the Thai Public Health Ministry in 2017 as part of its government's strategy in tackling HIV.

"Alongside increased education and awareness programmes on HIV prevention, MMA believes efforts to reduce the spread of HIV will be significantly more effective.

"However, PrEP alone is not the answer. There is still a need for continuous awareness campaigns on HIV prevention."

Last month, the Health Ministry announced that it will carry out a pilot project on the use of the PrEP medicine in several hospitals to assess its effectiveness and safety in reducing the risk of HIV infection.

Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the pilot project was necessary so that the drug can be certified by the ministry for public consumption.

When taken as prescribed, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99 per cent.