

PrEP: No One Should Be Left Behind — MMA

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Giving groups at highest risk of HIV access to the most effective preventive medication would be in line with Malaysia's commitment to universal health coverage, where all have equal access to health care and that no one should be left behind, says MMA.



Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai. Picture from MMA.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) believes that the use of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) will be key in continuing efforts to prevent and control HIV infections in the country.

We take note of the views expressed over the use of PrEP by various groups, however looking at the high numbers of HIV infections we are still seeing, we feel that a more effective national prevention strategy which includes PrEP is much needed.

With due respect to religious viewpoints expressed on the use of PrEP, the sole purpose of allowing people at highest risk of HIV access to PrEP is to prevent 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 in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for the community.

According to the Ministry of Health Malaysia's Disease Control Division's "[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.

We estimate cases to be much higher as the rate of testing is low.

It needs to be noted that apart from our adult population, children too can be at risk of HIV via transmission from mother to baby.

To be more effective in our prevention and control of HIV, it is imperative that groups at highest risk of HIV be given access to the most effective preventive medication available.

This would be in line with Malaysia's commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC), where all have equal access to health care (including preventive care) and that no one should be left behind.

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

Several countries have included PrEP as part of their national strategy to prevent spread of HIV, while some countries have recently launched a pilot project.

In Thailand, 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 spread of HIV will be significantly more effective. However PrEP alone is not the answer. There is still need for continuous awareness campaigns on HIV prevention.

Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai is the president of the Malaysian Medical Association.