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Early treatment for HIV proposed

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian AIDS Council president Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman yesterday urged the Health Ministry to adopt an early form of medical treatment for people living with HIV, as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

She told *theSun* that the treatment, known as antiretroviral therapy (ART) would help to block HIV transmission to others and encourage those identified as HIV-positive to seek early medical treatment before it develops into AIDS.

She also admitted the treatment may be expensive in the earlier stages, should the ministry agree to adopt WHO's recommendation as a government policy.

"However, prices for the medicine will reduce in the long term because it can be negotiated with pharmaceutical companies. "Also, by implementing this (recommendation), it will potentially reduce new infections which can be more expensive to treat in the future," she said, adding that the current medical costs for a HIV-positive individual in Malaysia is approximately RM300 per month.

Earlier, international AIDS experts, together with WHO, had called on all countries to initiate earlier treatments for HIV-positive adults while the immune system in their white blood cells is still strong.

They were speaking to the press here at the International AIDS Society conference held for the first time in Asia.

In an immediate response, Health Ministry director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah texted: "We have to study the issues and challenges (of the recommendation) thoroughly and work closely with WHO (on the matter)".