The Star

Expert: Cases of teens with STDs may be higher

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PETALING JAYA: There may be under-reporting in cases of teenagers with sexual transmitted diseases (STDs), says a public health expert.

Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh, a health economics and public health specialist with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, said the actual number is likely to be higher than what was revealed in Parliament recently.

On Oct 30, Eucation Minister Fadhlina Sidek said in Dewan Rakyat that based on data from the Health Ministry, 913 teenagers, with some as young as 13, had tested positive for syphilis, gonorrhoea, chancroid and HIV from 2018 to 2022.

Dr Sharifa Ezat said such cases happened due to many factors including more socialisation and sexual encounters, experimenting with new things and risk-seeking behaviours common among young people.

“These things have also become an accepted culture among youngsters, who have more liberty in choosing partners,” she said.

She added that young people may experience symptoms of STDs but delay seeking treatments and continue to have unprotected sex.

According to the MyHEALTH portal, a person should go to a doctor if the individual experiences itching, swelling or redness around the vagina or penis, unusual discharge, or pain in the lower abdomen.

In the National Health and Morbidity Survey: Adolescent Health Survey 2022 released by the Health Ministry recently, it was revealed that 154,646 adolescents in Malaysia had engaged in sexual activities.

It noted that 33% of that number had engaged in sexual activities before the age of 14. The age of consent for sex in Malaysia is 16.

The survey was conducted from June 12 to July 8, 2022, involving secondary school students aged between 13 and 17.

It also revealed that 75% of them reported having sex recently, and 88% of those who had sex did not use any condoms or birth control.

The survey reported that 11% of the teenagers had more than one sexual partner.