**Philippines gov’t urged to look into HIV/AIDS threat**

National AIDS Council says foreign works are to blame for rise in new infections

By Daniel Zimmermann

**HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany:** HIV/AIDS is increasingly threatening health workers in the Philippines. Figures released by the Philippine National AIDS Council suggest that infections have almost doubled over the last year. Members of the House of Representatives are now urging law-makers to review existing HIV/AIDS regulations in order to contain the ongoing spread of the virus throughout the country.

The Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act, which prescribes precautionary guidelines with regard to preventing HIV transmission during medical procedures and surgery, was promulgated in 1998. Since then, the number of infections has sky-rocketed from a few hundred to an estimated 6,000 by end of this year.

Representatives of the National AIDS Council have said that the rise of infections is mainly due to Filipino workers infecting themselves through unprotected sexual contact abroad and transmitting the virus when they return home. According to figures from the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, one out of every four Filipinos diagnosed HIV positive is working abroad.

The Department of Health has announced that it will look into the problem to decide whether workers abroad should undergo HIV testing before they leave the country.

“We have to ascertain whether existing policies and measures under the Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act are adequate to suppress the epidemic and improve the conditions of Filipinos living with the destructive disease,” Liquefied Petroleum Gas Manufacturers Association party-list representative Arnel Ty said in a press release. “We also have to find out if the mandates of the law are being fulfilled fast enough, and enforced rigorously.”

Experts estimate that under the current regulations the number of new HIV infections could increase to 20,000 within the next five years.

**Fluoride get uncovered by new test**

A new test method developed by chemists from the Florida State University in Tallahassee in the US is showing potential to detect dangerous levels of fluoride in drinking water. The technology is said to use a aromatic compound called naphthalene diimide that changes into different shades of colour after interacting with fluoride.

According to the researchers, the test is able to find about 1,000 of a milligram of the mineral in a litre of water which makes it one of the most sensitive fluoride sensors known to date.

In an effort to contain tooth decay, large quantities of fluoride are currently added to drinking water in a number of countries including Australia, Malaysia or Brunei. However, the intake of higher levels can lead to fluorosis, a condition that significantly weakens teeth and bones. Research has also shown that it contributes to the development of several types of cancer.

**Children in Brunei have worst teeth**

A new report on oral health in Brunei is showing that the country’s children suffer from severe levels of tooth decay. According to figures released by the Department of Health in December, dental caries between 6- to 12-year-old children currently ranks lowest among all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

While nine out of ten 6-year-old Bruneian children have already experienced decay, 12-year-old children have to live with cavities in at least five of their permanent teeth.

The country has been desperately trying to improve the accessibility of oral health services to children through its 2008 Oral Health Agenda that includes dental hygiene education and other preventative measures in schools.

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