

New HIV statistics released

THE number of new Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) cases reported last year reached a record high, according to latest statistics from the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Last year, there were 456 new cases, up from 423 in 2007. Almost all were from men who formed 93 per cent of those infected. Transmissions among homosexuals and bisexuals also formed a higher proportion at 185 – or 41 per cent of the new cases. This was up 7 per cent from the previous year.

The MOH did not cite reasons behind the increase in HIV cases, but more measures were put in place late last year to encourage more people to come forward for testing, and to identify those in the early stages of the disease, which causes the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (Aids).

The number of anonymous test sites increased to seven from three, and an opt-out testing scheme for those above

21 was rolled out at all public hospitals.

However, half the new cases reported already had late-stage HIV infection, similar to the pattern in previous years. Of the 404 cases detected outside of prisons and drug rehabilitation centres, 12 per cent were from voluntary screening, similar to 2007.

Over half were aged between 30 and 49, and about six in 10 were single.

For the first time in at least seven years, no case of mother-to-child transmission occurred. The number of single males, however, increased by 21 per cent to 280 cases.

The latest figures bring the number of HIV-infected Singaporeans to 3,941. As of Dec 31 last year, 1,799 are asymptomatic carriers, 914 had Aids-related illnesses and 1,228 have died.

A total of 7,944 sexually transmitted infections – including HIV – were reported last year, a slight increase of 2.4 per cent from 2007. NEO CHAI CHIN

THE GRANGEFORD

Tenants' reprieve

SOME 200 sub-tenants in a condominium off Orchard Road have till June 14 to move out or sign a new and costlier lease – all because their former landlord did not seek approval to turn the original apartments into rooms for sub-letting.

Yesterday, the building's owner, Cove Development, terminated its lease agreement with the landlord, Ideal Accommodation.

But in a reprieve for the sub-tenants – some of whom were told on Sunday they had 48 hours to vacate their units – the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has granted Cove up to July 27 to restore the units to the original layouts.

Ideal had converted the 141 apartments into 600 self-contained units and began sub-letting them this year after leasing the Grangeford condo at Leonie Hill from Cove.

The tenants, from countries such as the United States, South Korea and India, signed agreements of between six months and a year.

the Planning Act. Ideal was given until May 30 to remove all partitions and end the unauthorised sub-letting. The deadline was extended to yesterday after Ideal appealed.

However, the URA said yesterday, "apart from removing the partitions from 141 studio units, Ideal Accommodation had not taken any remedial action" on the remaining 459 room units run mostly "as an unauthorised boarding house or hostel use".

Yesterday, Cove Development – a wholly-owned subsidiary of Overseas Union Enterprise – told the authorities it was terminating the tenancy agreement and would act to restore the condo units. The URA has granted a grace period for it to do so.

Informed of this by TODAY, tenants – some of whom were last night moving out boxes of belongings – were relieved.

Bank employee Ashish Sharma, 29, moved in just four weeks ago and got a move-out notice on Sunday. "I was sleeping and they (staff) knocked on my door and told me I needed to move out in two days ... This is so frustrating. I just want a peaceful solution and I want to stay for at least

But on April 29, the URA told Ideal it had infringed



Tenants reading the press release from Cove Development. WEE TECK HIAN

one month more."

Another tenant managed to find new lodgings in the same area within hours of getting the notice. But the 26-year-old risk analyst said: "They keep putting off giving us our security deposit back. I am waiting for it so I can move out."

In a statement, Cove said it was "empathetic to the situation faced by Ideal's tenants ... and is prepared to explore possible options with them".

One tenant told TODAY they had been given three choices: Stay till June 14, with no guarantee of refund of deposits; Sign a contract with Cove and pay \$2,600 a month for a two-room unit or \$3,500 for three rooms; hotel accommodation as an alternative.

Cove will meet with tenants in the next few days. ALICIA WONG



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