

Home HIV test by 2009?

Oral-based kit to be available here once it gets US FDA approval

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SOON, you could be tested for HIV in the same way you currently take a pregnancy test – in the privacy of your own home, with a home test kit.

And it may happen by 2009, if the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gives its approval.

“The FDA in the United States is evaluating that, and once the FDA approves the sale of over-the-counter kits, I would expect the same to happen in Singapore,” said Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Information, Communication and the Arts, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, yesterday.

He was speaking at the sidelines of a World Aids Day 1.5km walkathon at Orchard Road yesterday.

Chief executive of Rockeby biomed, Dr Tan Sze Wee, told TODAY that his company’s oral fluid-based test kit – the only such kit on the market – may get FDA approval by 2009.

Singapore is set to hit another record number in new HIV cases this year – probably more than 400, said Dr Balaji, surpassing last year’s record of 357 cases.

HIV rapid testing is available in



GOOD CAUSE: Dr Balaji (centre) at yesterday’s Walking to Stop Aids event. DON WONG

some 100 GP clinics now. And making such kits accessible is especially important with Ministry of Health figures showing that there were 356 newly-detected cases of HIV cases between January and October this year.

The ministry has been putting in anti-HIV measures, and a pilot project involving voluntary HIV testing for adult male patients will start either this month or next month at one of the public hospitals, added Dr Balaji. Voluntary HIV testing for healthcare workers has already been introduced in hospitals.

“It has been very successful and almost all our healthcare workers have subscribed to it and gone

for testing,” said Dr Balaji.

The MOH is also mulling an amendment to the Infectious Diseases Act, which makes it an offence for HIV-positive people to have sex – regardless of whether they know of their status, as long as they have reason to believe they have been exposed to the risk of contracting the virus.

But they are not liable if they have informed their partner, who voluntarily agrees to undertake the risk, or if they have practised safe sex or tested negative before the act.

The Walking to Stop Aids event saw MAC Cosmetics donating \$100,000 to the Action for Aids Medications Assistance Fund.

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All veggies on sale are safe: AVA

THE Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) says all vegetables sold in Singapore are safe for consumption, following checks at vegetable farms in Sungei Tengah and the Lim Chu Kang Agrotechnology Parks, where red spots were found on crops there.

The spots were caused by a dye released from an RSAF aircraft being tested at Tengah Airbase in preparation for an upcoming aerobatic display.

The AVA said the red spots were found on crops in six farms in the Lorong Semangka area in Sungei Tengah. The farmers have three days to destroy the affected crops, which come up to about 200 tonnes of vegetables.

Dr Paul Chiew, AVA deputy director of Veterinary Public Health, said: “The AVA’s priority is to assure the safety of food, including vegetables. As the red dye is not approved for use in food, the AVA is requiring all

vegetables in the six affected farms to be destroyed as a precautionary measure.”

The AVA said that once the affected crops are destroyed, the farmers must irrigate their land to flush out any remaining traces of the dye.

The Ministry of Defence (Mindef) said the amount of red dye deposited will not cause adverse effects when inhaled or when in contact with the skin.

Mindef said the RSAF conducted a ground trial that involved producing red smoke from one of its stationary aircraft at the airbase on Nov 23.

Strong winds may have dispersed the residual dye from the smoke to the farms. It is looking into the case and has suspended all such trials.

Those who need help on this matter can call the Mindef hotline at 1800-760 8844.

— CHANNEL NEWSASIA

SINGAPORE SNIPPET

TOUGHER RULE FOR SELLERS OF SECOND-HAND GOODS

Starting last Saturday, sellers of second-hand goods such as cellphones, scrap metal, watches and other electronic items must be registered with the Police. As of Nov 19, 200 dealers have already done so. Under the new Act, details of the buyer and seller of every transaction

must be recorded. Such details must be made available to the Police for five years. The Act aims to make it more difficult for stolen goods to be sold. More than 1,000 cases of scrap metal theft were reported in the first nine months of this year, a 25-per-cent increase from the same period last year. — CHANNEL NEWSASIA



BLAST FROM THE PAST: Orchard Road was ‘invaded’ on Saturday afternoon by an army of warriors marching down the shopping belt, shouting battle cries. Passers-by were particularly amused to see the fearsome-looking warriors having to wait for the traffic lights to turn in their favour before they could cross the road.

The march was staged to promote *The Warlords*, the latest film collaboration between MediaCorp Raintree Pictures, InnoForm Media and Shaw Organisation. The movie centres around how three brothers struggle to cope with war and political upheaval during the late Qing dynasty. It is directed by acclaimed director Peter Chan and comprises a star-studded cast including Jet Li, Andy Lau and Takeshi Kaneshiro. The movie opens in cinemas on Dec 13. — CHANNEL NEWSASIA

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