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[EDITORIAL]

False sense of comfort

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Three decades into the Aids pandemic, health officials say they have the medicine and other tools to stop the spread of HIV, the Aids virus. It no longer strikes a mortal fear like it once did.

Since 2001, the global rate of new HIV infections has fallen 33 per cent, from 3.4 million a year to 2.3 million a year in 2012. Consequently, the sense of crisis has waned. But the reality is that people are still becoming infected and many are still dying from the scourge.

What has set in is a sense of complacency - not just among at-risk individuals, but also among donor countries. As editor of The Lancet Richard Horton said recently: "Total donor funding has stagnated at about the same level since 2008... The illusion that we have finally subdued HIV is a dangerous one. Every single day there are still 6,000 new infections. About 40 per cent of these new infections are in young people."

In Singapore, heterosexual infections used to be in the majority for many years. A change happened in more recent years, with a worrying rise in infections among homosexual men. The number of homosexual and bisexual cases has risen from 166 in 2009 to 247 last year, as disclosed by the Health Ministry recently. This can be attributed to a mix of recklessness and the assumption that HIV infection is no longer the death sentence it used to be.

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