



Pair of siblings first Aids orphans in S'pore

One of them is HIV-positive and is supported by KKH fund along with 24 other children

■ BY THERESA TAN

ABOUT 20 years after Aids first surfaced in Singapore, the Republic has seen its first Aids orphans – a pair of siblings who lost both parents to the disease.

One of the two children is infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which causes

Aids, but does not know about the diagnosis.

The KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) chief medical social worker told The Straits Times that the two children are now being cared for by foster parents.

However, Ms Sylvia Mun declined to reveal more about the siblings in order to protect their privacy.

All she would say is that the child infected with HIV is in primary school and has been in foster care for the past two years.

"Other family members were unable to look after the child, who is adapting very well to the foster family," added Ms Mun.

The child is the first Aids orphan to be supported by the KKH Health Endowment Fund, which helps women and children with HIV, cancer and other chronic illnesses. KKH is the only hospital in Singapore that treats children with HIV.

It has been estimated that more than 15 million children aged below 18 have been orphaned by Aids worldwide.

In Singapore, the number of people diagnosed with HIV this year looks set to hit an all-time high. In the first 10 months of this year, 382 people were diagnosed as HIV-positive, 7 per cent more than the 356 cases uncovered over the same period last year. As of June, a total of 3,636 Singaporeans have been diagnosed with HIV, and 1,176 of them have died.

Since 1985, when the first HIV patient was reported in Singapore, 29 children aged between infancy and nine have been discovered to have HIV.

Ms Mun said she does not foresee "too many Aids orphans in the near future". This is because some of the children have only one parent with the illness, so the other parent can look after them.

Currently, the KKH fund pays for the treatment and medication of 25 HIV-positive children aged between one and 16.

These children had caught the infection from their parents and were born HIV-positive.

"Most of these children don't know they have HIV," Ms Mun said. "Apart from regular medication, they lead a normal life like other children. They play, go to school and attend classes."

Dr Anita Menon, an infectious diseases expert at KKH, said it is "absolutely safe" for children with HIV to attend school, mix and play with other children.

She added: "You can't get HIV just by touching a person with the infection."

Dr Menon explained that HIV is spread through infected blood or blood products, sexual contact, sharing contaminated needles by drug abusers, from mother to child during pregnancy, or through breast milk.

To help HIV-positive children with their medical costs, contact KKH on 6394-2327 or e-mail kkhef@kkh.com.sg

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