

30pc yearly increase in HIV cases

By SUSIE WELDON

CASES of HIV infection in Hong Kong are increasing by about 30 per cent a year, while the number of people developing full-blown AIDS is rising even faster.

The news comes as 12 HIV infections were identified last month, the highest for any one month.

Department of Health AIDS expert Dr Lee Shui-shan said the new cases confirmed earlier indications that the rate of infection was steadily increasing.

He said the June figures brought the number of new cases in the first six months of this year to 44 – a third more than the same period last year.

Three AIDS cases were also recorded last month, bringing the total number for the first six months of this year to 13.

Four cases were recorded in the first six months of last year.

Dr Lee said it was not surprising that the number of AIDS cases was rising faster than HIV infections.

“What it means is that people who caught the infection early in the epidemic



Dr Lee Shui-shan

are developing complications now.

“It takes time for one HIV infected person to develop AIDS – five or 10 years sometimes,” he said.

Dr Lee, head of the Department of Health's AIDS preventive programme, warned that the disease would start to become “more visible” in the community.

“There will be a higher chance that somebody in the room, or outside, will have a friend or come across somebody with AIDS,” he said.

Dr Lee said the half-year figures also confirmed that heterosexual contact was now the most important

mode of infection, involving two thirds of all cases.

Eight of the 12 cases reported last month were infected through heterosexual contact, three through homosexual or bisexual contact and one was unknown.

Eleven of the victims were men. Seven were Chinese.

A total of 381 people have been infected with HIV so far, 86 of which have developed AIDS.

Meanwhile, about 200 Filipinos are calling a Tagalog-language AIDS hotline each day. The Department of Health has not even officially launched the service.

Dr Lee said the Tagalog hotline was one of three new helplines providing recorded messages on AIDS. The other two are in Vietnamese and Thai.

Dr Lee said that although the lines had been operating for the past six months, the department had not officially launched the service because it wanted to ensure all the supporting leaflets were available.

However, news of the hotlines had obviously filtered into the Filipino and Vietnamese communities in the territory, he said.