Annual reported cases continue to rise

The first case of HIV infection in Hong Kong was reported in 1984. Under the voluntary and anonymous HIV/AIDS reporting system, the Department of Health has received a total of 3198 reports of HIV infection at the end of 2006 (Fig. 1). The number of reports increased gradually every year. The number of HIV reports received in 2006 was 373. People with HIV infection develop into AIDS when they suffer from immunodeficiency due to HIV infection. The yearly number of AIDS reports received has remained stable since 1996, most likely contributed by the introduction of effective highly active anti-retroviral treatment (HAART) at around the same time. About 60 new AIDS reports are now received each year. The most common illnesses presenting at AIDS are Pneumocystis pneumonia and Tuberculosis.

According to World Health Organization’s definition, the HIV prevalence in Hong Kong is low from available data. It was estimated that there are about 3200 people living with HIV in the territory as of 2005. The overall prevalence in adult population was estimated to be less than 0.1%, as determined in surveys of different populations.

Most infections were in adult, men and Chinese

A majority of the HIV reports belonged to men and Chinese. In 2006, eight out of ten reports were men. Non-Chinese, who make up 5% of the Hong Kong population, accounted for 35% of the reported cases. People aged between 20 and 49 accounted for 85% of reports in 2006 (Fig.2-4).
Unprotected sexual contact is the main risk for HIV

The HIV epidemic in Hong Kong started off in a group of about seventy recipients of HIV infected blood or blood products diagnosed in the mid 1980s, and a few isolated cases believed to have contracted the virus outside Hong Kong. Afterwards, sexual contact has become the most important risk for HIV transmission. A proportion of cases did not have risk ascertained due to inadequate information.

A dynamic rising trend of infections among men having sex with men (MSM)

In 2006, heterosexual transmission accounted for 33% of all HIV reports (Fig. 5) and about one fourth of cases in men (Fig. 6). HIV infection among MSM is a particular cause for concern in recent years. Local studies have shown that about 2% of men aged 18-60 are sexually active MSM, but infections among them contributed to 31% of all HIV cases and 39% of that in men in 2006. A definitive rise in the number of reports was observed after 2003 (Fig. 7). The number of HIV reports from MSM was persistently higher than that from heterosexual men since last year. A seroprevalence survey conducted in 2006 revealed that 4% of MSM in gay saunas and bars were HIV positive. The cluster of HIV-1 Subtype B infections with similar gene sequencing which was identified in 2005 expanded from 20 to 34 cases, as of Sep 2006. Another cluster which involved 12 cases was identified in 2006. Homosexual or bisexual contacts were commonest route (about 80%) of infections in these cases. These indicated a rapid and local HIV transmission was occurring in the MSM population in Hong Kong.

Over the last 2 decades, infection among injecting drug users (IDU) only accounted for less than 5% of all HIV reports. Infections among IDU contributed to 15% of all reports in 2006 and most were non-Chinese. However, the prevalence of HIV among methadone clinic attendees remained at a similarly low level of 0.2-0.3% from 2004 to 2006.

There were two reports of HIV infections through perinatal transmission in 2006.

In 2006:
- One in every 20,000 new blood donors was tested HIV positive
- One in every 5,000 pregnant women attending public antenatal services was tested HIV positive
- One in every 800 attendees in STD clinics was tested HIV positive
- One in every 300 drug users in methadone clinics was tested HIV positive
- One in every 25 MSM in gay bars and saunas was tested HIV positive