

# China HIV leak violates patients' rights: WHO

July 19 2016

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A leak of HIV carriers' identities in China was a violation of their "fundamental right", the World Health Organization said, after reports that hundreds of infected people were approached by telephone swindlers.

A total of 313 HIV-positive people have been contacted by callers claiming to be government officials offering financial allowances in exchange for their banking information, the Southern Weekly newspaper reported Monday, citing campaign group Baihualin.

The bank details were used to steal money from their accounts, while those who identified the offer as attempted fraud were threatened with the online publication of their details, the report said.

China has a long history of ostracism of HIV/AIDS patients, making the disclosure particularly sensitive.

HIV-positive individuals have faced discrimination in the Chinese job market for years, and foreigners with the virus were banned from obtaining visas until 2010.

In December 2014 more than 200 people signed a petition to expel an HIV-positive eight-year-old boy from their village, prompting a national debate and highlighting the stigma involved.

"They called me by name and know my identification card number,

company, home address, marital status, even the time of my diagnosis and the hospital I go to," an unnamed Beijing carrier told the Southern Weekly.

The World Health Organization blasted the leak as an infringement of patients' rights and warned it could deter people from getting tested for HIV and from accessing treatment and prevention services.

"The confidentiality of the personal and health information of anyone seeking HIV or other medical services must be safeguarded," it said in a statement late Monday.

"The leak of personal information of people living with HIV is a violation of this fundamental right to patient confidentiality."

Chinese health authorities said they have reported the incidents to police and upgraded their encryption technology.

"The personal information of people infected with HIV/AIDS is protected by the law," the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement, vowing to "harshly crack down" on the crime.

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Citation: China HIV leak violates patients' rights: WHO (2016, July 19) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-07-china-hiv-leak-violates-patients.html>

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