

Sexual transmission of AIDS on the rise in Iran: official

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A senior Iranian health official warned Wednesday that sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS was on the rise, in part because of taboos about discussing sex.

Iran's deputy health minister Ali Akbar Sayari said the share of HIV transmissions through [sexual intercourse](#) had doubled in the last decade from 15 to 30 percent.

"The pattern of AIDS transmission through sex is on the rise and people need to be openly informed about it if it's going to be controlled," Sayari said at a press conference with Oleg Chestnov, a senior World Health Organization official.

The majority of AIDS transmissions in Iran continue to be through syringes shared among drug addicts, though Sayari said authorities have sought to limit infections by giving out free syringes.

Sayari gave no explanation for the rise in sexual transmissions, but lamented that the issue could not be discussed openly in the conservative Islamic republic.

"We cannot explain all these issues openly and transparently to the people," he said, according to official news agency IRNA.

"For instance, we cannot talk freely about condoms... people need to be given contraceptives."

Sex outside marriage is illegal under Iran's system of Islamic sharia law and in recent years the country has passed a series of laws restricting contraception in an effort to increase the birth rate.

As part of its efforts against HIV/AIDS, the government has for the first time set up centres to provide assistance to prostitutes, including checks for [sexually transmitted diseases](#), education on prevention and free contraceptives.

The [health](#) ministry said on Tuesday that there are about 32,000 people infected with HIV in Iran, without providing figures from previous years.

Of those about 84 percent are men and about 5,000 have contracted AIDS.

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