

# Key facts about the leak

The Ministry of Health (MOH) revealed yesterday that confidential information of 14,200 people diagnosed with HIV was stolen and leaked online.



## 1. What information was disclosed?

Data taken from the HIV Registry, involving 14,200 people diagnosed with human immunodeficiency virus up to January 2013, and 2,400 of their contacts. The leaked details included their names, HIV test results, identification numbers, phone numbers and addresses.

## 2. Who is affected by the leak?

A total of 5,400 Singaporeans and permanent residents (PRs) diagnosed with HIV up to January 2013, and 8,800 foreigners diagnosed with HIV up to December 2011. Of the 5,400 Singaporeans and PRs affected, 1,900 have died. MOH said that more than 1,000 of the 3,500 who are alive had been successfully contacted as of 4pm yesterday. According to the ministry, a large number of the foreigners are no longer in Singapore.

## 3. Who leaked the information?

Mikhy Farrera-Brochez (far right), an American who was on an employment pass here between January 2008 and June 2016. In March 2017, he was sentenced to 28 months in jail for fraud and drug-related offences, including lying to the Ministry of Manpower about his own HIV status. Farrera-Brochez, who was HIV-positive, was found to have used his boyfriend's blood for an HIV test to apply for an employment pass to stay here. He later worked as a polytechnic lecturer. He was deported upon completing his sentence in April last year.

## 4. How did Farrera-Brochez get hold of the information?

His partner was Ler Teck Siang, a Singaporean doctor who was head of MOH's National Public Health Unit from March 2012 to May 2013. Ler had the authority to access information in the HIV Registry for his work. Ler, who is still a registered doctor, has been charged under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) for failing to take reasonable care of confidential information regarding HIV-positive patients. In September last year, Ler was convicted of abetting Farrera-Brochez to commit cheating and of providing false information to the police and MOH. He has appealed against the two-year sentence.

## 5. Where is Farrera-Brochez now?

He is currently not in Singapore, and MOH was unable to comment further yesterday as the police are investigating the case. The police are investigating him for various offences, and the authorities are seeking assistance from their foreign counterparts.

## 6. When did MOH find out that information from the HIV Registry had been leaked?

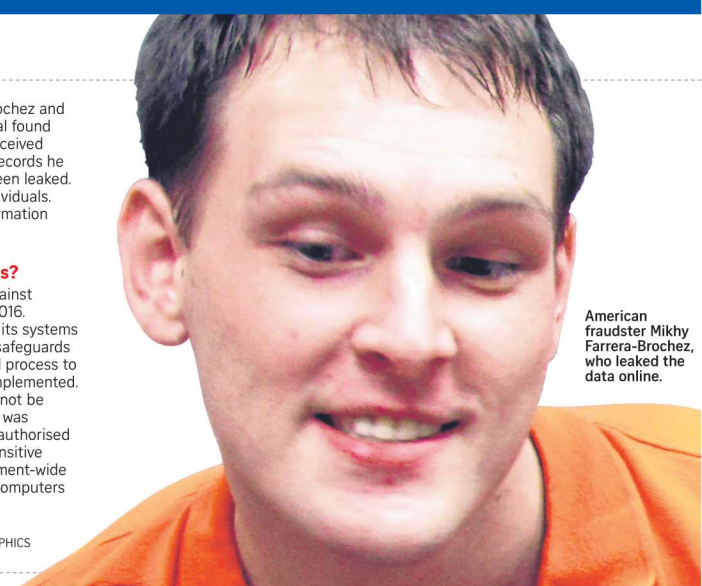
In May 2016, MOH received information that Farrera-Brochez held confidential information which appeared to be from the

HIV Registry, and a police report was made. Farrera-Brochez and Ler's properties were searched, and all relevant material found then was seized by the police. In May last year, MOH received information that Farrera-Brochez still had part of the records he had in 2016. The information did not appear to have been leaked. MOH made a police report and contacted affected individuals. Last Tuesday, MOH found out that he had put the information online.

## 7. What has MOH done to prevent future leaks?

The ministry has put in place additional safeguards against mishandling of information by authorised staff since 2016. Yesterday, MOH said it will continue to regularly review its systems to ensure that they remain secure and the necessary safeguards are in place. In September 2016, a two-person approval process to download and decrypt HIV Registry information was implemented. This process ensures that confidential information cannot be accessed by a single person. In addition, a workstation was specifically configured and locked down to prevent unauthorised information removal, and designated for processing sensitive information from the HIV Registry. As part of a government-wide policy, the use of personal storage devices on official computers was disabled at MOH in 2017.

TEXT: CHOO YUN TING PHOTOS: REUTERS, TNP STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



American fraudster Mikhy Farrera-Brochez, who leaked the data online.

## TIMELINE

### March 2008

Farrera-Brochez applies for an employment pass to stay in Singapore with Ler, using Ler's blood for an HIV test.

### March 2012 to May 2013

Ler heads the Health Ministry's National Public Health Unit and has access to the HIV Registry.

### January 2014

Ler resigns.

### May 2016

MOH lodges a police report after receiving information that Farrera-Brochez possessed information which appeared to be from the HIV Registry.

### June 2016

Ler is charged with offences under the Penal Code and Official Secrets Act. Farrera-Brochez is remanded in prison.

### March 2017

Farrera-Brochez is convicted of numerous fraud and drug-related offences, and sentenced to 28 months in jail.

### April 2018

Farrera-Brochez is released from prison and deported.

### May 2018

After Farrera-Brochez's deportation, MOH receives information that Brochez still has part of the records he had in 2016. At the time, the records did not appear to have been disclosed publicly. MOH makes a police report and contacts the affected individuals to notify them.

### September 2018

Ler is convicted of abetting Farrera-Brochez to commit cheating, and of providing false information to the police and MOH. He is sentenced to 24 months in jail.

### Jan 22, 2019

MOH is notified by the police that confidential information from the HIV Registry could be in Farrera-Brochez's possession, and had been leaked online.

### Jan 23, 2019

MOH makes a police report.

### Jan 24, 2019

MOH ascertains that the disclosed information matches the HIV Registry's records up to January 2013.

### Jan 24-25, 2019

MOH works with relevant parties to disable access to the information.

### March 2019

Ler's appeal against his 24-month sentence to be heard.