

TO: ALL MEDIA
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RESPONSE TO THE DA'S STATEMENT ON INFANT MORTALITY RATE AT MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is an indicator referring to the number of children younger than one year who die in a given year, per 1,000 live births during a particular year. At a national level, this indicator is linked to the Department of Health's strategic objectives which are manifested through a range of preventative and curative programmes and interventions aimed at ensuring that children survive and develop.

On the question and assertions by the Honorable Member of the Legislature, Mr. G Mari; we wish to state that there has been confusion on the numbers and responses to his question. He, in the first instance extrapolates information given for the period January 2008 to January 2009 for all babies to generalize on infants.

Secondly, for the period he refers to in his statement the data is as follows;

- The total number of deliveries during this period is 5536
- The total number of deaths in maternity services including both fresh still births and macerated still births as from January to September 2009 is 154.
- The perinatal mortality rate for the same period is 39.3 per 1000. In 2008, the perinatal mortality rate for Mahatma Gandhi Hospital was 44 per 1000 including babies born with birth weight of less than 1 kg and was 32.2 per 1000 with babies of birth weights of 1 kg and above.
- There is currently no threat of an infection related outbreak at Mahatma Gandhi Hospital. During the Infection Control Inspections for the last 4 quarters, Mahatma Gandhi Hospital had scored 92% for the first quarter and 85% in all the other quarters.

The IMR in particular reflects, firstly, on pregnant mothers' level of access to perinatal care, as the majority of deaths under the age of one year occur in the perinatal period (within the first 7 days of life). Secondly, the IMR serves as a good indication of the socio-economic conditions under which people live. It is therefore important for monitoring inequalities in socio-economic conditions and access to health-care services specifically.

The infant mortality levels differ across all the provinces. The Western Cape (31.7) and Gauteng (44.4) provinces fared better in comparison to the Eastern Cape (70.9) and KwaZulu-Natal (68.4) provinces. This is largely attributed to the differing HIV prevalence and infrastructure across the provinces.

As the mother's health is linked to that of the baby's, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and care giving are all important aspects that impact on the IMR. The IMR is thus a sensitive indicator of the availability, utilization and effectiveness of health care in general and of perinatal care in particular. Poor care of pregnant mothers could lead to detrimental outcomes to both mother and child.

In the context of the HIV & AIDS epidemic, this indicator provides information on the numbers of babies who die from HIV & AIDS as a result of vertical transmission (infection occurring during pregnancy, the birth process, or through breastfeeding) of the disease.

"It is both unfortunate and sensationalists for respectable Members of the Provincial Legislature (MPL) to speak on issues they have limited understanding on and/or ask questions for the purpose of sensation. Understanding the area from which the patient population of Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital draws from, and the number of interventions that the department is implementing; we would all be in the know that this is a situation that I have given priority to. We are also very happy that the hospital, in its own accord, is addressing the maternal care service problems together with Non-

Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and we hope that we would learn from them to improve maternal care services through out the province” said Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo; MEC for Health.

Ends

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