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## New dual protection billboards will help young people graduate alive, says KZN Health MEC

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, says the newly-launched Dual Protection billboard campaign will help the youth of the province to live longer and healthy lives, while affording students the chance to graduate alive and without unwarranted pregnancies.

Unveiling the first of 69 Dual Protection billboards at the Mangosuthu University of Technology today, MEC Dhlomo said this campaign is poised to enhance the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS infections in the Province.

Eleven similar billboards were unveiled in other parts of the province, while the other 57 would be posted at various sites throughout the province's 11 health districts in the coming weeks.

The Dual Protection approach promotes Medical Male Circumcision and the use of female contraceptive methods such as Implanon, injections or the loop method - while using condoms during every episode of sexual contact. This ensures protection against both sexually transmitted infections - including HIV - and unwanted pregnancies.

Statistics show that in South Africa, unplanned pregnancies contribute significantly to the high drop-out rate at high schools and institutions of tertiary education. The statistics further reveal that approximately one million babies are born each year, and 8% or 80 000 of them, are born to teen mothers.

Dr Dhlomo said that most teen mothers lose a sense of direction in life after falling pregnant, and also have a much higher chance of dying from pregnancy-related illnesses. They rarely ever reach their potential in life.

"The message that we are bringing is not relevant to grandmothers and grandfathers at the pension pay points... or to children at early child hood development centres. It's more relevant to young people of ages of between 14 and 34 years because they are the ones who are most at risk of being



*KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo in front of one of the 69 newly-launched Dual Protection Billboards*

infected with HIV and AIDS. They are the ones who fall pregnant due to failure to plan for their lives.”

Dr Dhlomo cited research which showed that girl children appeared to contract HIV much earlier than their male counterparts, due to sexual relations with older men.

“The research, by CAPRISA, showed us that almost all children who are entering school and finishing at grade 7 are HIV negative, both boys and girls... unless those one or two cases of failed Prevention of Mother To Child (PMTCT) HIV transmission. The following year, as they go to high school, the status quo prevailed, they are all HIV negative. But when they complete grade 12, about 7-10 % of girls are HIV positive, yet the boys have remained HIV negative. This is because the girls are not sleeping with boys of the or age. They are getting infection from the older generation. So, when they enter university, 10% of the girls are HIV positive. But by the time they finish their Honours degree after four years, there is 25% HIV positivity among both boys and girls, which means they have infected each other. Therefore, as a society we need to confront and condemn this practice whereby old men with big cars and money go after young girls. It should have no place in our society,” he said.

He urged students and young people in general to plan for their lives, prioritise their education and worry about relationships later.

“As young people, you must say, ‘As long as I’m in university, I’m going to graduate alive.’ I’m really pleading with you to plan. You can plan to use contraceptives as a young woman. As young man you can get circumcised at our institutions. Then use condoms at all times. All these services are free of charge.”

Dr Dhlomo said although abstinence from sex was the safest route, those who find it difficult to abstain need to behave responsibly.

“Always insist on a condom. Say to your partner, ‘I trust you, but I don’t trust myself. Therefore, let’s use condoms’. As a student, you must say, ‘I want my degree, or my diploma, therefore, I’m going to prioritise my future. I will prioritise contraceptives; whether it’s loop, injection or Implanon. Contraceptives plus condoms equals to no HIV and AIDS. It equals to no baby that is unplanned.”

Dr Dhlomo also delivered a message to health care practitioners, urging them not to reprimand young people when they ask for contraceptives.

“If a 17 year-old comes to your clinic, do not scold them. It’s not for you to judge. Give them what they are asking for. They are saying that they are now sexually active. Unfortunately, some of them are engaging in unprotected sex. Therefore, when they ask for help, please help them. It’s not for us to judge.”

While KwaZulu-Natal has 1 million people on ARV treatment, society now had the tools at its disposal

to prevent new infections, Dr Dhlomo said.

“We are doing well. We want to continue giving you a long and healthy life. But we don’t want new people getting HIV infected. So, you must always make a choice. If anyone falls pregnant or gets an HIV infection, you must not say you made a mistake. You must know it’s your choice. You have been provided with tools to say that even if you are sexually active, you must still not get HIV, or a baby that is unplanned for.”

He raised awareness about the dangers of alcohol, and its contribution to unplanned pregnancies, and the spread of sexually transmitted infections – including HIV.

“Alcohol impairs a person’s judgement. You end up taking your clothes off even when you’re not supposed to because your judgement is impaired. We are here because we need young people for the country. As young people, you are the future. We need you to take over from us and do even better than we have,” Dr Dhlomo said.



*KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, US Consul General Ms Frances Chisolm and the MEC’s wife, Mrs Nono Dhlomo, lead a team of aerobics performers during a “Healthy Lifestyle” walk ahead of the launch of the Dual Protection billboard campaign in Umlazi earlier today.*

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