

MEDIA RELEASE  
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## **KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health urges Youth to fight a new struggle: Protecting themselves against diseases**

While Youth Month and Youth Day on 16 June 2015 honours all the young people who lost their lives in the struggle against Apartheid and Bantu Education in 1976, the MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo believes that young people today have to wage war against a new struggle – the scourge of diseases confronting them.

South Africa faces a quadruple burden of disease made up of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and Tuberculosis; high maternal and child mortality; high levels of violence and injuries; and a growing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases.

Dr Dhlomo, who delivered a presentation on the management of HIV and Tuberculosis at the South African National Aids Council conference held in Durban last week, says: “In this country, we still have a challenge of HIV and Aids, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and illegal abortions among young people. Far too many youth live a sedentary lifestyle, with no physical exercise, which makes them vulnerable to obesity and diseases like diabetes and hypertension. But if young people can take up the cudgels and begin to change their lifestyles today, there would be a significant dent in the burden of diseases in future. It is never too late to change, and we as the Department of Health are here to help them.”

A survey by the World Health Organisation, titled Alcohol and Sexual Risk Behaviour: A Cross-Cultural Survey in Eight Countries, found that linkage exist between alcohol, risky sexual behaviour (unintended or unprotected sexual contact) and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV infection.

Dr Dhlomo has also issued a stern warning about the dangers of substance abuse and teenage pregnancy.

“My message to young people is, ‘Alcohol and drugs are not good for you. When you drink alcohol and abuse drugs you are at increased risk of contracting and/or spreading STIs, including HIV. You are also at risk of falling pregnant. If you’re a 16 years-old, and you’re delivering a child weighing 3,8kg, chances of delivering safely are slim. It actually places your own life and the baby’s in danger. This is something that all of us as society need to begin to talk about and discourage. We should be encouraging our young people to abstain from sex, or practice safe sex at all times.

“So, I’m saying to young people, ‘Your priority should be to get an education and necessary skills to build your future. You are still very young to worry yourselves about relationships. You need to wait for the right time. When you are matured enough to understand what you involve yourselves in, only then can you think about relationships. As government, we want to produce future doctors, nurses, psychologists, dieticians, therapists and many other healthcare professionals from among your ranks; who will go out there and serve our communities. But we cannot do it alone. We need you to help us, by helping yourselves and doing what’s right.”

Dr Dhlomo says that the Department has a range of health services on offer to help young people fulfil their potential and achieve their goals, including:

- Free male and female condoms,
- Free Medical Male Circumcision (which reduces the risk of female-to-male sexual transmission of HIV by approximately 60%)
- Free counselling and assistance for those addicted to alcohol and drugs,
- Dual Protection (using contraceptives such as Implanon, injections or the Loop method methods together with condoms during every episode of sexual contact.)

- Legal and safe termination of pregnancy.

ENDS



KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo is seen here with young people during the launch of the Dual Protection campaign in Pietermaritzburg earlier this year