

25 December 2015

KZN Welcomes 76 Christmas Day babies, as teenage pregnancy remains a concern

Health care workers at public health care facilities throughout KwaZulu-Natal have had their hands full since midnight, delivering a total of 76 Christmas babies by 2pm today.

By 6am today, the initial tally for KZN stood at 35 Christmas babies - 15 girls and 20 boys – born since midnight. However, by 2pm the figure had more than doubled to 76. This was made up of 40 girls and 36 boys.

Speaking at RK Khan Hospital in Chatsworth earlier today, KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo expressed delight at welcoming the new-borns, but said the number of teenage mothers remained a concern.

At least 11 of the mothers are under 18 years of age. This includes a 14 year-old who gave birth at St Appolonaris; two 15 year-olds who gave birth at Lower Umfolozi War Memorial and Murchison Hospitals respectively; as well as a 16 year-old whose baby was born at Mosvold Hospital.

Five of the mothers were aged 17, and they delivered their babies at Prince Mshiyeni (3), Mahatma Gandhi Memorial, Murchison, Christ the King and Church of Scotland Hospitals.

Accompanied by Head of Department, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, the MEC handed out gifts, which included clothes and disposable nappies.

The MEC and HOD then proceeded to King Edward VIII Hospital, where 36 year-old Zilungile Zulu from Mayville had given birth to a set of female twins, exactly at midnight.

MEC Dhlomo reiterated his warning about the perils of teenage pregnancy, saying that it was a contributor to the high school drop-out rate.

Researchers at the University of Colorado, New York University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that someone without a diploma is more at risk of premature death than someone who does have one. And according to the World Health Organisation, babies born to adolescent mothers face a substantially higher risk of dying than those born to women aged 20 to 24.

Dr Dhlomo said the South African government always encourages abstinence from sex for as long as possible – until one is physically and psychologically ready to deal with its consequences.

“For those who cannot abstain from sex, we encourage the use of Dual Protection, which promotes Medical Male Circumcision and the use of condoms during every episode of sexual contact for men; and combining this with the use of female contraceptive methods. This ensures protection against both sexually transmitted infections - including HIV - and unwanted pregnancies.”

The KZN Department of Health recently launched the Adolescent and Youth User-Friendly health initiative. The aim of this campaign is to change staff attitudes of certain health workers who tend to judge young people who visit health care facilities to seek reproductive health services.

“Health workers need to understand that if the youth is not treated in a manner that makes them feel welcome to seek health services; they then rely on uninformed advice or the help of their peers – usually with disastrous consequences.

“Therefore, the solution to curbing the rising rate of teenage pregnancy, the spread of sexual

transmitted diseases and illegal abortions lies, to a considerable extent, with the establishment of Youth and Adolescent Friendly Health Institutions,” said Dr Dhlomo.

The MEC also encouraged the young mothers to breastfeed their babies for as long as possible, citing the many health benefits of this.

Dr Dhlomo will be at Edendale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg on the morning of 01 January 2015, to welcome babies born on New Year’s Day. Members of the Media are invited to attend.

ENDS

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