

## **MEDIA RELEASE:**

# **KZN Health MEC urges society join in the fight against the spread of Hepatitis**

28 July 2015

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has called on the people of the province to join hands help fight against the scourge of Hepatitis, which is affecting society.

Today, 28 July 2015, is World Hepatitis Day, and the theme is: *Prevent Hepatitis, Hepatitis affects everyone, everywhere. Know it. Confront it.*

The Department of Health is engaged in a drive to create awareness on the various types of Hepatitis; how it can be prevented, its symptoms and how it is treated.

### **What is Hepatitis?**

Viral hepatitis is the inflammation of the liver due to viral infection. The disease is caused by several types of viruses; hepatitis A, B, C, D and E, but the most common viruses are hepatitis A, B, C.

Hepatitis viruses can cause acute hepatitis that is a short-term illness and most persons fully recover, but a small proportion of persons can die from acute hepatitis. Infection with hepatitis A and E are usually self-limiting. Hepatitis B and C viruses can cause chronic hepatitis, in which the infection is prolonged, sometimes lifelong. Chronic hepatitis can lead to liver cirrhosis, liver failure, and cancer.

Over two billion people are infected globally and more than 240 million have chronic liver infections due to hepatitis B virus. About 170 million people are infected with HCV and more than 350 000 people die from liver disease related to the infection. Hepatitis A and B are endemic in South Africa.

### **Transmission of Hepatitis:**

Hepatitis A and E viruses are highly contagious and transmitted through contaminated food and water. They can also be spread by eating raw shellfish that have come from water contaminated by sewage.

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through blood and other bodily fluids (i.e. saliva, semen and vaginal fluid) of an infected person. It can pass from mother to child during childbirth.

Hepatitis C virus is transmitted mostly through blood and blood products, commonly through unsafe injectable drug use. It can also pass from mother to child during childbirth.

Hepatitis D (delta) virus usually occurs with hepatitis B virus as a co-infection or super- infection.

The symptoms of viral hepatitis are:

- Jaundice, which causes yellowing of the skin and eyes
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Low grade fever
- Headache
- Dark urine



### **Prevention:**

Vaccines offer protection against hepatitis A and hepatitis B diseases. However, there are no vaccines for hepatitis C, D, and E. However, reducing exposure to the viruses offers the best protection.

Dr Dhlomo said: “We would like to urge the public to take precautions, such as using condoms and to avoid sharing needles or items such as toothbrushes, razors or nail scissors with an infected person. It is also wise to avoid getting tattoos or body piercings from unlicensed facilities. Ensure safe and rational use of injections. Injecting drug users are at increased risk of hepatitis C and B infections, largely because of unhygienic needle and syringe sharing practices. Always practice safe hygiene and sanitation in order to be prevent hepatitis A and hepatitis E infections.”

The MEC also urged the public to consume safe food and avoid drinking water that has come from a potentially unsafe source, and to always dispose of sanitary waste properly.

ENDS

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health