

MEDIA RELEASE:  
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## **KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, visits Harry Gwala District in response to the high maternal mortality rate**

Pregnant mothers who do not visit clinics out of fear of being tested for HIV may end up endangering not only their own lives, but also those of their unborn babies.

And drinking traditional concoctions such as isihlambezo to induce the delivery of a baby – including by pregnant children in their teens - is a deadly practice that should have long been abolished.

These are some of the warnings issued by KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, at a community engagement meeting at Nokweja, in Highflats, Harry Gwala District, on the KZN Midlands earlier today.

Harry Gwala District has been identified as one those with a high rate of maternal and child mortality in the province, recording an equivalent 217/100 000 which translated to 5 deaths per 2300 women who delivered in the past financial year.

During the community dialogue, various speakers gave an assortment of reasons that contribute to mothers delaying or not attending antenatal classes once they suspect they are pregnant, including that:

- Pregnant young girls are afraid of being reprimanded by their parents or partners, and thus don't want their pregnancies to be discovered;
- They are too scared of being tested for HIV, in case they are HIV positive;
- Those who are employed are too afraid to report to their bosses because their pregnancy may result in them having to take time off from work;
- Some girls and young women were too afraid to visit clinics to ask for contraceptive.

Other speakers urged parents to have an open relationship with their children, including monitoring whether they have received their menstrual periods.

However, MEC Dhlomo strongly urged women to take note of the dangers of pregnant women not seeking medical attention immediately.

“We are appealing to pregnant mothers to stop being afraid of going to clinics. It is not helpful. We will not stop examining you when you get to the clinic because it helps to find out if you are HIV positive. For those who get checked and are found to be HIV positive, we have a package of services that helps to ensure the delivery children who are HIV negative, and to also ensure that the HIV in the mother is properly managed to help them live long and healthy lives.”

MEC Dhlomo said that Government would not win the fight to reduce the rate of mother and child mortality alone.

“Community leaders, mayors, councillors, traditional healers need to work together to save expectant mothers as when a maternal death occurs, its devastating effects reverberate from the immediate family to the whole community.

MEC Dhlomo also expressed concern that young girls were still falling pregnant way too early, calling upon parents to engage in sex education with their children.

“Girls aged under 18 should not be falling pregnant because they are physically not ready for it. It’s even worse when they use isihlambezo (traditional concoction), to induce delivery almost immediately...”

The MEC then urged parents to advise their children not to get involved in romantic relationships too early – and to abstain from sex for as long as possible.

He said that young girls who can no longer abstain from sex to go to their nearest clinic and use Dual Protection, which is the use of female contraceptive methods while using condoms during every episode of sexual contact. This ensures protection against both sexually transmitted infections - including HIV - and unwanted pregnancies.

MEC Dhlomo also warned health care workers about the dangers of admonishing young people when they seek family planning services, cautioning that failure to assist result in these young girls later presenting themselves pregnant or complicating from unsuccessful backstreet abortion. Dhlomo implored the healthcare workers to ensure that more health facilities offer Adolescent and Youth-Friendly health services.

MEC Dhlomo concluded the visit in the area by officially opening the R8 million worth Sokhela Clinic in Donnybrook which the community accepted and embraced it with great joy.

ENDS

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health