

MEDIA RELEASE

17 May 2016

## **Catch hypertension before it catches you, warns KZN Health MEC**

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has made an appeal to the public to undergo free health screening at least once a year, in order to nip “silent killer” non-communicable diseases such as hypertension in the bud before they cause irreparable damage.

The MEC’s stern warning comes as World Hypertension is being commemorated worldwide today, 17 May 2015, under the theme “Know Your Numbers.”

“Promoting health and wellness is critical to preventing and managing lifestyle diseases, particularly the major non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. To become a healthy nation, South Africans need to make informed decisions about what they eat, whether or not they consume alcohol or should smoke, among other factors. Healthy lifestyles, including keeping a healthy diet and regular physical exercise, can make all the difference. Many people are walking with ailments without even knowing it. But when you undergo health screening, it means diseases can be detected early, which makes it easier and cheaper to treat and or manage them,” says Dr Dhlomo.

The purpose of World Hypertension Day is to promote public awareness of hypertension and to encourage citizens of all countries to prevent and control this “silent killer”.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health provides health screening free of charge at all its health facilities, and at all its community outreach programmes.

The risk factors for Hypertension are:

- A family history of high blood pressure,
- An unhealthy diet, including excessive salt intake,
- Excessive alcohol consumption,
- Smoking,
- Being overweight (especially around the stomach area), which increases the risk 2-6 times,
- Lack of physical exercise,
- Stress levels,
- Old age,
- Pregnancy.

The signs and symptoms of high blood pressure include headaches, weakness, dizziness, sore eyes, blurry vision shortness of breath.

The following are guidelines for lowering or normalizing high blood pressure:

- Eat 3-6 small meals per day.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet, low in saturated fat (animal fats found in red meat, skin of chicken and full cream dairy products);
- Overweight people are advised to lose weight. Losing as little as 4.5kg can lead to a meaningful drop in blood pressure.
- Limit salt (sodium chloride) intake to one teaspoon per day. “Hidden salt” in processed foods represents 65-80% of our intake of sodium chloride with only 15% coming from the salt we add at the table.
- Limit your intake of processed foods, foods high in salt and those containing flavouring salts. Read labels of products for sodium content before purchase!
- Limit or avoid alcohol intake.
- Caffeine in coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate may cause blood pressure to increase temporarily. Excessive intake is therefore not recommended.
- Physical activity should be part of your daily routine. Try to exercise for at least 30-45 minutes most days of the week. Avoid strenuous exercise such as lifting heavy weights, which can raise blood pressure. Rather try walking, swimming, cycling or golf. Consult your doctor for advice on the type of exercise you should be doing.

Important: If you have been diagnosed with High Blood Pressure, take any medication exactly as prescribed. Don't stop or change it unless advised to do so by your doctor.

ENDS

Issued by Corporate Communications: KZN Department of Health.