

MEDIA RELEASE

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To : All Media

Attention : News Editors/ Health Journalists

Let us understand epilepsy, so we can help those in need – KZN Health MEC, DR Sibongiseni Dhlomo

Kwa-Zulu Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has called on society to support all those who are affected by Epilepsy. The MEC's call comes as South Africa commemorates National Epilepsy Week, which runs from 16 - 25 June 2016.

Epilepsy is a condition in which a person experiences recurrent seizures. Also referred to as "fits", seizures are caused by a sudden increase of excess electrical activity within the brain. An increase in electrical activity within the brain is known as epileptic activity.

Epilepsy affects 1 out of 100 people in South Africa and there are 50 million people in the world who live with this condition.

"Epilepsy is one of the misunderstood diseases in our midst. It is therefore very important for people living with epileptic patients to understand this condition and know what to do to assist them when they experience it," says MEC Dhlomo.

"This way you may assist the patient to cope better and/or seek medical help if necessary. People with epilepsy are not different to other people. They can still play, work and have fun like anyone.

The important thing is that they have to be careful around open fires or doing certain sports. They must always inform someone that they have epileptic fits," says MEC Dhlomo.

If a person gets an epileptic fit, the person falls to the ground and his whole body shakes. This can happen every day or once in a while. The person can look very scary if you do not know what is happening.

Doctors are not sure how people get epilepsy but they do know that if a family member has epilepsy, their offspring or relatives are at a higher risk of getting it too.

What to do if someone gets an epileptic fit?



- Remain calm.
- Call an adult if you're a child.
- Remove glasses or tight clothes.
- Turn the person on his side and put a pillow under his head.
- Sit behind the person with your knees into the person's back to prevent him from rolling onto his back.
- Cover the person with a blanket or towel.
- Do not try to make the fits stop, just stay with the person.
- If the person is asleep after a fit, let him sleep.
- If the person is confused, tell him he had a fit and that everything is now ok.

What can you avoid when having epileptic fits?

- Don't get too tired.
- Avoid swimming or bathing without supervision.
- Avoid flashing lights.
- Avoid TV games or computer games.
- Avoid sitting close to an open fire.

How is epilepsy treated?

The doctors usually prescribe medication and this will help control the epileptic fits. It is very important to drink the medication as prescribed by the doctor.

Certain medication must be taken once, twice or three times daily. It is very important to eat before taking the medication.

When taking oral contraceptives and epileptic medication, it is necessary to ask the nurse or doctor if extra protection is needed to prevent pregnancy.

The Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Health has selected institutions that render special care and support services related to any epileptic illness. Edendale and Grey's hospitals, both in Pietermaritzburg, have specialist clinics for children with epilepsy.

Children with suspected epilepsy are referred to Edendale and Grey's hospital Paediatric Outpatient Department from primary health care clinics.

Inkosi Albert Luthuli Hospital provides a quaternary specialist service and patients will only be attended to only if they have been referred by paediatric specialists and hospitals in the province according to the provincial referral protocol.

ENDS

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