

Warning: Herbal enemas can be fatal – KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo

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KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has issued a stern warning about the dangers of using herbal enemas for the treatment of ailments in children.

This follows a spike in the number of children who presented at public healthcare facilities with complications after being given the herbal enemas, in recent months.

In certain households, enemas are used to treat, among others, constipation, diarrhoea and vomiting, abdominal pain, “isolo”, abnormal stool colour or for bowel cleansing.

However, MEC Dhlomo says some enemas produce strong herbal toxins that are dangerous to rectum and internal organs, as they are not examined for safety and regulated by the Medical Control Council under the Medical Control Act.

This is in terms of the strength, ingredients, expiry date, as well as the mode of delivery.

“We are extremely concerned by what has been happening, and encourage parents and guardians of all sick children to rather come to health facilities if the children are sick, so that they can be treated. This includes adults themselves.”

MEC Dhlomo says that for mild diarrhoea, mothers or caregivers can give a child a mixture of Sugar-Salt Solution, which is made up of 8 level teaspoons of sugar, with half a teaspoon of salt in a litre of cooled, boiled water.

This home remedy is outlined in the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses Guidelines developed by the World Health Organization.

MEC Dhlomo adds: “We encourage mothers and caregivers - particularly gogos (elderly women) not to give herbal enemas to children, because these have been found to be dangerous.”

In cases of mild diarrhoea, if a child’s condition does not improve after using the Sugar Salt Solution, the mother/caregiver must take the child to the clinic immediately.

This is applicable in situations where the child:

- Is an infant under 2 months of age, who is not feeding and has a fever
- Vomits everything;
- Has fast breathing or the normal breathing pattern is affected;
- Has chest in-drawing;
- Is weak, lethargic or unconscious;
- Is having fits/convulsions;
- Passes a lot of watery stool and has sunken eyes or a sunken fontanelle (a space between the bones of the skull in an infant), or the watery stool contains blood;
- Is unable to be breastfed or unable to drink; and
- In cases of any form of injury where bleeding is severe

ENDS

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