

22 December 2016

## **Warning: Do not succumb to the "September baby" phenomenon during the festive season, says KZN Health MEC**

WITH the December holidays now in full swing, KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has appealed to young people throughout the province to either abstain from having sex or use condoms and contraceptive methods which are available free of charge, so that they don't succumb to the "September baby" phenomenon.

An analysis of data over a three year period (2013-2015) shows that KZN hospitals recorded more deliveries of babies during September than in any other month, meaning that most mothers had conceived their pregnancies during the December holidays.

MEC Dhlomo also expressed concern that out of the one million babies born countrywide each year, 8% (or 80 000) are delivered by teen mothers who, by sheer virtue of their age, are neither physiologically nor psychologically ready to bear children.

This often leads to serious health complications which may result in the death of the mother, her baby or both.

"It is no secret that, during the school holidays and the festive season, many young people may be tempted to experiment with new and dangerous things. This includes substance and alcohol abuse; and unprotected sex, which may have adverse and long-lasting effects on their lives.

"We are always concerned – not just in December, but in any time of the year, when young people fall pregnant at a young age because it is very unsafe. If you're a young person under the age of 18, and you're delivering a child weighing 3,8kg for instance, chances of delivering safely are slim. It actually places the mother's own life and the baby's in danger."

"We are therefore appealing to young people to pause and consider the consequences of their actions. We are saying to them, 'Do not allow temporary 'fun' during the holidays to disturb your progress in life.' If you have unprotected sex now, you will be a mother come September. Even worse, you might contract a sexually transmitted infection or even HIV. Also, research has shown that people who have unplanned babies at a young age are likely to have even more children, and they are at risk of dying way before their time."

MEC Dhlomo says that sex should be spoken about openly – instead of being treated as a taboo subject - because, when practiced without adherence to safety, it can have life-altering and deadly consequences.

"This is something that all of us as society, including community leaders and educators in the classroom, need to begin to talk to our children about. We must not pretend that by keeping quiet, children will not have sex. Or that if they do, they know the "do's and don'ts".

"We have to encourage children to abstain from sex, and also tell them about the alternatives

available to them if they cannot abstain. We must encourage those who can't abstain to apply Dual Protection by using male or female condoms during every episode of sex, while combining this with contraceptives, as well as medical male circumcision.”

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health offers nine different contraceptive methods, which are available free at public health clinics. These are:

- Sub-dermal contraceptive implant. (Implanon) effective for 3 years;
- Copper IUD. - Loop (non -hormonal effective for 10 years);
- Hormonal injection. (2 or 3 monthly is available);
- Oral contraception pills. (Daily)
- Emergency contraception. In case of condom burst or after unprotected sex;
- Male and female condoms;
- Vasectomy for men who have reached their desired family size;
- Voluntary female Sterilisation.

MEC Dhlomo also urges healthcare workers to ensure that young people feel welcome to seek assistance from public healthcare facilities.

“Health workers need to understand that if the youth is not treated in a manner that makes them feel welcome to seek health services; they then rely on uninformed advice or the help of their peers – usually with disastrous consequences. We do not want that,” he said.

ENDS

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health