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MEDIA RELEASE:

## **Family planning / contraception can reduce maternal and child mortality rate and save lives, says KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo**

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called on all parents, guardians and teachers at schools throughout the province to speak frankly and honestly with children about the risks of unprotected sex, such as unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection.

This comes as South Africa joins the world in commemorating World Contraception Day today (26 September 2016).

MEC Dhlomo says 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 health complications which may result in the death of the mother, her baby or both.

“We are always concerned 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, chances of delivering safely are slim. It actually places the mother’s own life and the baby’s in danger.”

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 them to abstain, 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.

The MEC also urged 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 says.

ENDS

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