

MEDIA RELEASE:
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New vigor injected into anti-teenage pregnancy message

IN an effort to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy and HIV infections in the province, KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC has invoked a message from the bible to drive home a message that young people must take better care of themselves.

MEC Dhlomo announced that the Department will be adopting a scripture from the book of Timothy 1, verse 12, and incorporating it into its anti-sugar daddy/blesser campaign, which is also aimed at curbing the high rate of teenage pregnancies in the province.

In isiZulu, the scripture says: “Makungabi bikho muntu odelelela ubusha bakho... Phansi Ngama-Blesser, Phansi!” (Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young... Down with Blessers, Down!!!)

He was speaking at a community outreach programme at Esidunjini, Ilembe District, on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, where the Department also offered general health and eye care screening and medical male circumcision services, among others.

Addressing a tent full of school children and adults, MEC Dhlomo said the Department is still concerned that despite massive efforts to ensure wide scale HIV treatment and to curb its spread, statistics show that women between 15 – 24 are still particularly at risk of acquiring new HIV infections. This is mainly due to intergenerational sex with older men, also known as sugar daddies or blessers.

“As a Government, we have come to accept that, as a matter of fact, young people do engage in unprotected sex. As a result of unprotected sex, they fall pregnant and get HIV and sexually-transmitted infections, which remain high in this Province at 57/1000 against the target of 35/1000.

“We ask for assistance from parents and society at large, in the promotion of celibacy; adherence to one sexual partner and use of HIV prevention and family planning services that are available in the Department.”

He called on young people to abstain from sex for as long as possible, saying that falling pregnant – which usually comes with unplanned pregnancy and HIV infection – does not happen by mistake.

“You take a decision... to say, ‘I will take off my clothes.’ You just can never say it was mistake. You prepare yourself to go there [and have sex]. Let there be no one who will say they don’t know what happened when they fall pregnant. You make a conscious decision that these things are going to happen. It starts there. Therefore, it is up to you to ensure that that does not happen.”

South Africa will commemorate World Contraception Day on Monday, 26 September 2016. MEC Dhlomo also told the audience that out of one million babies are 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.

He also alluded to the results of a study by the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research

in South Africa (CAPRISA) that shows that girl children appear to contract HIV much earlier than their male counterparts.

The study discovered that almost all children who are entering school and finishing at grade 7 are HIV negative, except for a few cases of failed Prevention of Mother To Child (PMTCT) HIV transmission.

The following year, as they go to high school, the status quo prevails but when they complete grade 12, about 7-10 % of the girls are HIV positive, yet the boys have remained HIV negative. This is because the girls are not sleeping with boys of the same age.

“The irony of this situation is that when they enter university, 10% of the girls are HIV positive but by the time they finish their Honours degree after four years, there is 25% HIV positivity among both young men and women, which means they have infected each other.” MEC Dhlomo said the Department had launched the Dual protection Campaigns, targeting students at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Institutions of Higher Learning.

“If we are to win the war against HIV and AIDS, there needs to be behavioural change, particularly among the youth. Our message is that diseases must be prevented, because prevention is better than cure.

“Young people are therefore urged to abstain from sexual activity for as long as possible – or to apply Dual Protection by using male or female condoms during every episode of sex, while combining this with medical male circumcision.

“We also strongly urge parents, guardians and young people themselves to opt for medical male circumcision, which has been found to reduce the risk of female-to-male sexual transmission of HIV by approximately 60%.”



KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo with members of the united Congregations Church at Esidunjini in Ilembe District

ENDS

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