

24 March 2016

## **KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, hails gains made in fight against TB, but says more needs to be done**

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has thanked all health care workers and other role players involved in the fight against the spread of TB, saying their collective efforts had already begun making a tangible difference in a province regarded as the epicentre of the disease.

However, MEC Dhlomo has expressed concern about the delayed testing and diagnosis of people living with HIV, saying this still posed a challenge.

Speaking on World TB Day, which is commemorated worldwide on 24 March 2016, Dr Dhlomo says the TB treatment outcomes have substantially improved over the years in KwaZulu-Natal; moving from a 55% treatment success rate in 2005 to 86.3% in 2014.

“A huge amount of effort is being exerted in the quest to create ‘A world free of tuberculosis – zero deaths, disease and suffering due to tuberculosis,’ as envisioned by the World Health Organisation.

“Among these are the efforts by health care workers; Government’s Operation Sukuma Sakhe programme, our communities, and the developmental partners who have all played a pivotal role in ensuring screening and adherence to treatment. For this, we are very grateful.

“We have also implemented a massive TB screening campaign in all 11 health districts in KwaZulu-Natal. This puts emphasis on screening for TB all people visiting health facilities regardless of the reason for their visit,” says Dr Dhlomo.

Regrettably, however, the province also has a high co-infection rate of TB and HIV, which currently stands at 65%. The biggest impediment here is the delay in the diagnosis and treatment of TB in people with HIV.

“This is why we always urge the public to get a free health examination at least once a year, so that if diseases exist, they can be detected and treated early. This requires the collective effort of all sectors of society. We really cannot win the fight alone as government,” MEC Dhlomo adds.

Dr Dhlomo says the high TB infection statistics are as a result of the Department’s intensified case finding interventions, put in place in the health facilities, in the community and in schools.

Since the launch of the “Tackling TB in Schools” campaign in October 2014, 13 085 learners have been screened, of which 343 were found to have signs or symptoms of TB. The programme continues in earnest.

“Overall, we are indeed making good progress, as integrated TB/HIV services are now accessible and available in all the 779 public health facilities.

“Our country also has the largest number of the GeneXpert machines in the world (289 all in all), with KZN allocated 90 of them spanned all over the Province. These machines have

greatly assisted in the early diagnosis of TB and MDR-TB and allow initiation of TB treatment within 24-48 hours.

To intensify the response to TB in KZN, the following has been planned:

- Find every TB suspect through Massive TB screening campaign
- Test all suspect school children, and
- Test all the inmates at least every 6 months
- Test every TB suspect using GeneXpert technology
- Promptly initiate on Treatment every TB patient
- Trace and screen all the contacts and relatives of every TB patient
- Trace every TB patient lost to treatment, and to
- Improve treatment adherence for good treatment success rate

ENDS

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