

# Awareness is key to preventing oral health challenges, says KZN Department of Health

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The KZN Department of Health has re-affirmed its commitment to raising awareness about Oral Health as one of the 3 common barriers to learning, alongside eye-related and hearing difficulties.

The Department, through Integrated School Health Programme, visited Intaphuka Primary School at Ndwedwe, near Tongaat, and screened hundreds of learners for oral, eye and hearing-related ailments.

The Department remains concerned by reports that indicate that oral disease levels appear to be increasing in major sectors of the South African population, especially the underserved, disadvantaged and urbanizing communities.

In fact, statistics show that over 90% of the world's population will suffer some form of dental disease in their lifetime but many of these can easily be treated or prevented with a good oral care routine.

It has been found that a high number of children in the country present with dental problems when they start their formal schooling. Inevitably, such challenges end up having a negative impact on their schooling.

*"Good oral health habits are best instituted at an early age, hence the decision to introduce preventive programmes in Early Childhood Development Centres in the form of oral health education and tooth brushing," said Mr Jimmy Mthethwa, a Chief Director responsible for, among others, oral health in the Department.*

*The efforts of the Department are geared towards integrating other interventions directed at Primary School Children. Our aim is to ensure the prevention of poor nutrition; poor hand hygiene (hand washing); which lead to many childhood illnesses like diarrhoea, severe malnutrition and eye sight problems.*

*It is very crucial that we attend to the children at this level of their development as a means to minimise their pain and discomfort; long term expenditure on treatment; unnecessary loss of school days; later in life productivity and some degree of social stigma."*



*Dr Jimmy Mthethwa, Nomo Khumalo (Managing Director at Henry Schein Southern Africa) and Sindi Mthethwa (KZN DOH) handing over toothbrushes and tooth paste to learners from Intaphuka Primary School*



*Learners from Intaphuka Primary School with their new toothbrushes  
Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health For more information, please contact Samuel Mkhwanazi on 081 038 2193*