

Healthcare workers called upon to protect themselves against TB infections

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The Head of Health in KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, has called on all healthcare workers in the province to protect themselves from possible TB infection, saying that being responsible for providing healthcare does not make them immune from contracting the air-borne disease.

"When I went to China recently, I noticed how everyday people were wearing medical masks. It concerns me that in South Africa there are health workers who chose not to protect themselves", he said.

Dr Mtshali was speaking at a community outreach programme to create awareness about TB in the workplace in Pietermaritzburg yesterday (20 March 2017), just a few days ahead of the World TB Day, which is being commemorated around the globe on 24 March 2017.

World TB Day is designed to build public awareness that tuberculosis today remains an epidemic in much of the world, causing the deaths of nearly one-and-a-half million people each year, mostly in developing countries.

In South Africa TB kills 80 percent of HIV positive people, and it is responsible for 120 000 deaths annually. Government wants to reduce this number to less than 20 000.

Dr Mtshali said that healthcare workers should test for TB at least once a year as they are among the key populations susceptible to the disease.



Head of Health Dr Sifiso Mtshali (centre) joins prince Nhlanganiso Zulu (extreme left), Dr Victoria Mubaiwa, Ms Nothemba Kole and Dr Siphon Nyathi in signing the TB pledge.

Proceedings took place amid a joyful atmosphere, characterised by the efforts of employees of the KZN Department of Health, who marched from Natalia Building to the Capital Towers in the central business district.

The marchers sang songs of encouragement to those affected by TB, highlighting its curability, but also emphasizing the need for prevention and early treatment. Staff members also signed a pledge committing to protecting themselves and those around them from TB.

Dr Mtshali said TB infection can be prevented through:

- Wearing face masks in the healthcare setting;
- Covering the mouth during coughs;
- Opening windows to let air flow and circulate freely;
- Not spitting on the ground; and
- Washing hands regularly with soap and water.

The signs and symptoms of TB are:

- A cough for longer than 2 weeks;
- Chest pains;
- Tiredness and weakness of the body;
- Loss of appetite and weight;
- Night sweats, even when it is cold; and
- Coughing up blood.

Facts about TB:

- TB is curable even if you are HIV positive;
- TB can be anywhere, everywhere, and everyone must screen for TB
- Take your TB treatment without fail for 6 months and be cured;
- Cover your mouth with your elbow when you cough;
- Open your windows for fresh air;
- Wash your hands regularly; and
- Go to your nearest clinic for screening