

Educating women can help reduce the rate of maternal and child mortality, says KZN health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called on society to ensure that girl children have the same access to education that is afforded to boys, as this will make them and their children less likely to die during – or after - giving birth.

“We must educate women. There is an international indicator... a guarantee ... that when women have access to information, they are unlikely to have challenges that may result in maternal mortality. But uneducated mothers, on the other hand, cannot prioritise maternal care, and are at high risk of dying during or after childbirth. This is because due to socio-economic pressures, they do not even have time to prioritise antenatal care. They have other pressures, and information that can help them in terms of preventing maternal and child deaths does not become easily accessible,” he said.

MEC Dhlomo was speaking at Stanger Hospital today (25 December), where he announced that 56 Christmas Day babies (33 boys, and 23 girls) had been born throughout the province by 7am.

As of midday today, the number of Christmas Day babies born in KZN has risen to 64 (36 boys and 28 girls).

Accompanied by the Head: KZN Health, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, Dr Dhlomo handed out gifts and also gave words of encouragement and advice to two mothers, Simangele Makhoba and Nompumelelo Mbokazi, who delivered their Christmas babies at Stanger Hospital.

The welcoming of the Christmas babies took place amid a jubilant atmosphere, featuring



some spirited singing and dancing from the nurses who were joined by Dr Dhlomo and Dr Mtshali.

The occasion was also used to celebrate the huge strides made by Stanger Hospital in the significant reduction of the rate of maternal mortality; from 16 in 2013/14; to 13 in 2014/15; to 8 in 2015/16 and just four maternal deaths since April 2016. The hospital delivers, on average, 7200 babies each year. Hospital CEO Ms Thamele Ngcobo, who was herself born at Stanger Hospital, said this reduction could be attributed to, among others:

- Strengthening of community outreach programs, including Operation Sukuma Sakhe Wednesdays;
- Training of health care workers: resuscitation skills, anaesthetics, Essential Steps in the Management of Obstetric Emergencies;
- Effective engagements at the regular perinatal and maternal mortality meetings.

MEC Dhlomo, however, decried the fact that two of the mothers of the Christmas Day babies are aged just 16 years old. He said that teenaged mothers, by sheer virtue of their age, are neither

physiologically nor psychologically ready to bear children. This often leads to serious 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 big baby, which does happen, chances of delivering safely are slim. It actually places the mother’s own life and the baby’s in danger.”

MEC Dhlomo also called on young people to either abstain from sex or use Dual Protection (a combination of condoms and female contraceptive methods) in order to avoid unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.

He 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 said.

MEC Dhlomo emphasized the need for all mothers to follow the immunization schedule as

set out in the “Road to Health” chart that all new mothers receive from public health facilities.

“It’s very important for babies to be immunized, as this gives them protection against many diseases. We must not only celebrate the arrival of these babies, but also ensure that they are nurtured and protected,” he said.



Pic 1

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo and maternity ward Sr in charge Dudu Ndlovu hand over Christmas baby Mnotho to his mother, Simangele Makhoba, at Stanger Hospital while the KZN Head: Health, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, looks on.

Pic 2:

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo and Sr Dudu Ndlovu Dr Sifiso Mtshali congratulate Nompumelelo Mbokazi on the birth of her Christmas baby Asemahle.

Photos by Mondli Mwandla/KZN Department of Health

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