

# **“14 year-olds should not be falling pregnant,” says concerned KZN health MEC DR Sibongiseni**

**Dhlomo also: MEC Dhlomo issues warning about firecrackers, following a number of injuries**

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KWAZULU-NATAL Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says that his Department will continue waging war against Sugar Daddies/Blessers, while also spearheading programmes such as “She Conquers”, which is aimed at helping adolescent girls and women to take charge of their own future through education and health literacy.

MEC Dhlomo was speaking at Edendale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg this morning, where he welcomed the arrival of 46 New Year’s Day babies (22 boys and 24 girls) from public hospitals around the province. By 12pm, the number had risen to 51, with 25 boys and 26 girls. It has emerged that two 14 year-old mothers have given birth at Newcastle Provincial Hospital – a report which left MEC Dhlomo shocked and concerned.

Also among the province’s youngest New Year’s Day mothers are two 15 year-olds, one 16 year-old and three 17 year-olds.

“We wish to emphasise that there is no bonus for a teenager to fall pregnant. When someone who is aged under 18 falls pregnant, it poses a risk to the life of both the mother and her child. Most teenagers who fall pregnant don’t go back to school. Instead they give birth to more babies. Ultimately, they lose out in life. Young people who fall pregnant too early are also not giving a bright future for the children they give birth to. They perpetuate a cycle of poverty. It’s something that should not be happening.”

MEC Dhlomo says that it has been established that young girls and women aged between 15-24 are at highest risk of getting infected with HIV, usually due to sexual relations with men who are much older than them.

MEC Dhlomo said that the province’s anti-Sugar Daddy Campaign had borne much fruit, having ignited a debate about this dangerous phenomenon. “We have already had a number of young women talking about this. Some of them have had relationships with older men, and are now warning the young ones about the bad consequences of these inter-generational relationships.”

MEC Dhlomo added that the “She Conquers” national campaign, launched by Deputy President Mr Cyril Ramaphosa two years ago, will continue to be accelerated in the province.

“We are saying to young women, the men who sleep with them do not do so out of love, but out of lust. Our message is, ‘You don’t need someone who will come into your life and yield negative results.’ We will not stop these campaigns. We will continue engaging with young people.”

MEC Dhlomo also expressed concern that one of the 17 year-old mothers of the New Year’s Day babies had never attended an antenatal clinic.

“These are some of the things that worry us. Mothers who are under 18 years are considered high risk. One of them did not attend antenatal clinic, which is problem, because if such a mother has certain health challenges which could pose a threat to her life, we will not be able to intervene on time.”

MEC Dhlomo, however, expressed his happiness that both mothers who gave birth to New Year’s Day babies at Edendale will be breastfeeding them. “That is a very important message that we need to transmit because breast milk contains nutrients which go a long way in protecting

the baby. Our wish is for all mothers to breastfeed exclusively, at least for the first six months of a baby's life."

Meanwhile, MEC Dhlomo issued a warning to the public to exercise caution when handling firecrackers. At Edendale Hospital seven patients, including a 12 year-old girl, have had to receive medical attention after sustaining various injuries during the New Year's Day celebrations last night.

Dr C Serfontein from the orthopaedic unit at Edendale Hospital, said the girl had sustained injuries to her palm, index finger and ring finger. "The patient will lose the tip of her ring finger, and will need occupational therapy rehabilitation to regain maximum functionality of her hand.

Another patient, an 48 year-old woman, also sustained injuries to her thumb when a firecracker exploded in her hand, injuring her thumb and index finger. She will lose the tip of her thumb.

MEC Dhlomo said: "We would like to urge the public to be careful when they handle fireworks. These injuries could have been avoided. We could have avoided having to book a theatre, and to have a team of nurses and doctors attend to these patients, if this had been handled properly."



*MEC Dhlomo attends to a young patient injured by a firecrackers*



*MEC Dhlomo congratulates Ningi Zwane for the birth of her New Year's Day baby Zanokuhle while the baby's father Lebo Ndlovu looks on.*



*A patient injured by firecrackers*