

Spotlight on women's health: "Ordinary women can help improve cancer treatment and cure outcomes by presenting early," says MEC Dhlomo

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KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says the incidence of cancer in the province can be significantly reduced, and treatment and cure outcomes improved, if more women could conduct self-testing for breast cancer - and present themselves at healthcare facilities early for pap smears to check for cervical cancer.

Speaking today at a "Women and Health" outreach programme at Osizweni, Amajuba District, where he is political champion, MEC Dhlomo also called for parents and legal guardians to ensure that all children, particularly girls, go to school. This, he said, will help them grow up to become better informed citizens who are able to take wise decisions concerning their own health. MEC Dhlomo urged pregnant women to assist the Department by seeking antenatal care as soon as possible and not miss clinics; and once their babies are born, ensure that they adhere to the immunization schedule.

He also advised mothers to breastfeed their children exclusively for the first six months, as this would help strengthen their growth and boost their immunity to disease. He also vowed that the Department would continue to strengthen its programmes to vaccinate girls aged 9 and younger against Human Papilloma Virus, which causes cervical cancer later in life.



MEC Dhlomo says that unlike in the past, where women used to suffer from post-menopausal bleed (a symptom of cervical cancer) around the age of 60, they are now developing cervical cancer as early as the age of 35.

"We want to reverse that, and women can help us by checking their own breasts regularly for any irregularities; while also coming forward to get screened and tested for cervical cancer," he said.

The MEC added that the Department will be intensifying its other health campaigns are aimed at young people, such as First Things First, Graduate Alive, and D.R.E.A.M.S, which stands for "Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe". It seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Decreasing new HIV infections in girls and young women by at least 30%; from 90 000 per year, to less than 60 000;
- Decreasing teenage pregnancies (under 18) from 73 000 to 50 000;
- Increasing the number of girls who finish matric by 20%;
- Increasing youth employment and economic opportunities by 10%.

Before addressing a full hall at Osizweni Community Hall, MEC Dhlomo led a spirited health awareness march through the township's streets, which was followed by an aerobics class, to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Reflecting on the Department's upcoming campaigns, MEC Dhlomo said: "Having just emerged from August, which is the month of women, we are going to strengthen campaigns focusing on young women so they grow and become competitive in life.

"The campaign is embedded on celebrating the life of our giant uMama Albertina Sisulu, a nurse by profession, who would be 100 years old today. In her centenary we want to strengthen and empower women, and improve the quality of life."