

"Reducing teenage pregnancy can halve the number of mothers who die while giving birth", says MEC Dhlomo

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KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo believes more open dialogue about the dangers of unprotected sex and teenage pregnancy could reduce by up to half the number of mothers who die while giving birth, or shortly afterwards.

"Significantly, teenage pregnancy accounts for about 8 -10% of all deliveries in the country, which is about a million deliveries per year. But close to 45% of maternal deaths in the country come from this small 10% (of teenaged mothers), because these young people generally delay coming to our clinics. They hide the pregnancy. And by the time they come to deliver, there are certain complications that cannot be reversed. Therefore, if we were to reduce or eradicate teenage pregnancy, we would significantly improve the maternal health outcomes of the province."

The MEC was speaking at GJ Crookes Hospital in Scottburgh, where he also announced that by 08h00, KwaZulu-Natal had had 36 babies (17 boys and 19 girls) born on New Year's Day.

Thirty year-old Bongwiwe Mlotshwa's daughter was the first New Year's Day baby in the province, arriving exactly on the stroke of midnight, at Eshowe Hospital. At Addington Hospital, 24 year-old Sindisiwe Gumede gave birth to a set of boy twins. The two youngest mothers of New Year's Day babies are aged 16, and gave birth at Ekhombe and Edendale Hospitals. There are also three mothers aged 18 who gave birth at Rietvlei, St Apollinaris, and Emmaus hospitals; and another three aged 19, whose babies were born at Nkandla, St Apollinaris and Edendale hospitals. The oldest mother of the New Year's Day babies in the province is aged 43, and gave birth at Edendale Hospital.



Kwenzekile

Myende and her baby Owami is congratulated by MEC Dhlomo, acting HOD Dr Musa Gumede and Cllr Thabani Dube and his counterpart at Umzumbe Municipality Cllr Sizwe Ngcobo
Although GJ Crookes Hospital was also concerned by the rate of teenage pregnancy in its catchment area, the MEC said he is nevertheless pleased that it has developed a programme of

community dialogues to heighten awareness about the benefits of abstinence, protected sex, and the dangers of teenage pregnancy.

He applauded the hospital for having not recorded a single maternal death for the past three quarters of the year. Describing the hospital as a beacon of hope, he also commended the mayor of Umdoni Municipality Cllr Thabani Dube and his counterpart at Umzumbi Municipality Cllr Sizwe Ngcobo respectively, for being active members of the hospital board. He said both leaders had set a good example of how the involvement of community leaders can improve efficiency at a healthcare facility.

The governance of this hospital, not only on the side of management, but also in terms of community leaders who are supporting it, is what makes it to be this strong. Recently, we had a meeting with the Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi where we expressed our concern regarding the rate of maternal deaths, which are coming in mainly from district hospitals.

Listening to the leadership of this hospital, from doctors to nurses... how much they are supported by the district specialist teams... and consultants from neighbouring hospitals, I would wish that we could take the lessons from here and cascade them to other hospitals to improve maternal and child health outcomes because that is one our main goals.