

MEC Dhlomo wants the complete eradication of HIV transmission from mother to child

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Although the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV has dropped from 20% to 1% over the past 10 years in KwaZulu-Natal, provincial Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says the focus should now be on ensuring that not a single baby acquires HIV from their mother.

HIV can spread from a woman to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. However, through early testing and detection of HIV; commencement of Antiretroviral Treatment; and adherence to treatment instructions, the risk of infection can be eliminated.

Speaking yesterday during the commemoration of World Aids Day at Madadeni, under Amajuba District, MEC Dhlomo said: "We have done extremely well to reduce the rate of Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV from 20% in 2008 to just 1%. That is a significant milestone. The challenge now is to make the Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV a reality. We will continue working hard to achieve that."

In line with the theme of World AIDS Day "Know Your Status - Cheka Impilo," MEC Dhlomo urged all citizens to get tested for HIV at least once a year.

He also listed a number of accomplishments that have been made in KZN to curb the spread of HIV and to improve access to treatment.

These include:



MEC Dhlomo is joined by the Mayor of Amajuba District Dr Musa Ngubane and Bishop Mahlangu in lighting a candle in remembrance of people who passed away due to AIDS

- The enrolment of 1,3 million people on the Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) programme;
- The immediate provision of treatment to any patient who tests positive for HIV, without making them wait for their CD4 count to drop (Test & Treat programme);

- *The circumcision of more than 1 million men and boys (decreasing the rate of HIV infection by up to 60%) in just 10 years - with not a single death reported;*
- *Improving the TB treatment outcomes from a 65 % treatment success rate in 2009 to 88.7 % in 2017. According to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) KZN has had the highest decline in the TB incidence, with a decrease from 1 149 per 100 000 people in 2011 to 481 per 100 000 people currently.*
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- *Introducing the Fixed Dose Combination drug, which means that people only need to take one tablet daily instead of three, as used to be the case previously.*
- *The training of nurses to initiate patients on Antiretroviral Treatment, which used to be performed only by doctors.*
- *The training of healthcare personnel in the Adolescent and Youth user Friendly programme. This means that they attend to all the healthcare needs of young people, including supplying them with condoms, other contraceptives and Choice of Termination of Pregnancy services – without passing judgement or making them feel unwelcome in any way.*

MEC Dhlomo said: "When you consider how far we've come as a country and province, it sometimes becomes difficult to believe the many strides that have been made to weaken HIV, which once seemed like a deadly and unstoppable monster.

"As we symbolically remember those who lost their lives to AIDS, we also celebrate the massive progress that we have made. HIV and AIDS used to ravage our societies. People used to get sick, and develop all the symptoms that made others start speculating what they were suffering from. It stripped them of their dignity. Our cemeteries became battle grounds for burial space, bursting with groups of sad and heartbroken people burying their loved ones every weekend."

But today, that is no longer the case. The life expectancy of South Africans has now increased from 45.5 years for men and 48.4 years for women and women from 2001 – 2006; to 57.8 years for men and 63.5 years for women from 2016 onwards. So, people are no longer dying in large numbers.

We have restored people's hope and dignity, and given them the precious gift of life.

Indeed, having a healthier citizenry means that people live for a long time, until their children are old enough and are independent."

MEC Dhlomo said more focus would also be put on protecting girls and women aged 10 – 24 – who face the highest risk of getting infected with HIV.

We will continue with the implementation of programmes such as D.R.E.A.M.S and She Conquers, which were launched in 2016 by President Cyril Ramaphosa. They are meant to empower girl children by keeping them in school, and supporting and encouraging them to grow up and be independent and self-sufficient, so that they don't rely solely on men to get by in life.