

KZN Health MEC still concerned by people unknowingly living with TB; urges people to get screened if they have TB symptoms as Government will not win TB fight alone

27 March 2018

Although KwaZulu-Natal has made significant progress in improving rate of curing people who have TB, there are still far too many new TB infections, and too many people who are unknowingly living with the disease. All of this is making KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo extremely concerned.

MEC Dhlomo earlier today (27 March 2018) embarked on the third massive TB awareness campaign in under a week, at Eshowe, on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. This follows a high profile World TB event held in Durban last Thursday and another awareness campaign held on World TB Day at KK Hostel, Clermont, last Saturday.

Accompanied by the Department's TB ambassador, Prince Nhlanganiso Zulu, MEC Dhlomo handed out pamphlets with TB information at an Eshowe taxi rank and also engaged with taxi operators and commuters about how to prevent TB, how to spot its signs and symptoms as well as the importance of adhering to the correct treatment schedule in order to prevent Drug-Resistant TB.

KwaZulu-Natal has made steady progress in the fight to curb the spread of TB. In 2016 there were a total of 62 790 new confirmed TB cases which translated to 580 cases per 100 000 population. This signifies a decrease from 73 318 TB cases in the previous year. The Districts with more than 700 per 100 000 population TB notification rate are ILembe, UGu and eThekwini respectively.

Despite the high burden of TB and high TB and HIV co-infection rate of 65%, the provincial treatment outcomes have progressively improved from 55% in 2005 to 88.6% in 2016 which surpasses the target of 85%.

However, eThekwini, Amajuba and UMgungundlovu did not meet this target and have to revive strategies which were previously implemented which led to a reduction in the defaulter rate, which is patient education, tracking and tracing of patients.

In a bid to fight TB head-on, TB screening is now standard practice at all health facilities in the province, which was enforced by a circular in 2014. The circular states that all attendees regardless of the reason for the visit should be screened for TB.

Speaking at Eshowe, MEC Dhlomo said: "We have now decided that the fight against TB is bigger than one MEC, one Department, or one Government. It needs all of us. Therefore, the clarion call by His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini that all traditional leaders, traditional healers and priests should get involved in the fight to curb the spread of TB is an extremely important one. TB, from time immemorial, has been killing people. And it continues to do so.

In KZN, the figures are enormous. We are told that if you have 250 new TB infections per 100 000 people, that is considered by the WHO as an epidemic. We in this province are four to five times more. We are sitting with up to 800 new TB infections.

So, you therefore can see how big the problem is. Unless and until KZN puts a strong fight on TB, whatever efforts are being made in the whole country are not going to have any impact. Hence our appreciation for the leading role that His Majesty is playing to call upon all of us to continue in the fight against TB.

Yes, TB and HIV are twins. HIV comes in and lowers your immunity so much, that TB becomes an opportunistic infection and affects a person who would otherwise not have been affected.

We are at Eshowe now, but we will intensify this campaign through the province. Our Minister happens to be a Stop TB chairperson in the world. We have to stop the spread of TB and eliminate it in KwaZulu-Natal.

MEC Dhlomo says he is extremely concerned by people who do not finish their TB treatment as this provides fertile ground for the diseases to drug-resistant TB, which is complicated and takes longer to treat.

"It is really a big problem. If you don't complete your treatment, you place yourself at risk of having complications. We urge our people to finish medication for six months. "

"The most dangerous TB (including DR-TB) patients are the ones that we don't know about. Undiagnosed TB and MDR-TB patients are all around us. We have to find and diagnose these TB and DR-TB patients before we can stop transmission."

That is why we are accelerating this campaign. We want to see these people in our clinics and hospitals. If they have any of these signs, they must really come forward."



