



WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo observing as one of the pupils receives his COVID-19 vaccination

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## ESWATINI CONDUCTS FIRST HPV, DEWORMING INTEGRATED SCHOOL-BASED CAMPAIGN



With the support and leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners, the Kingdom of Eswatini has successfully conducted the first school-based integrated campaign, combining HPV and COVID-19 vaccination as well as deworming using Albendazole and Praziquantel.

Previously these interventions were given on separate campaigns. However, this time the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training agreed to give these interventions in one campaign held in June/July 2024. The campaign focused on pupils in primary and high schools, targeting girls 9-14 years for HPV vaccination, children 12 years and older for COVID-19 vaccination, while all pupils were targeted for Deworming. Additionally, children aged 6-19 years were given nutritional supplements as per need.

The deworming service aims to address bilharzia and

soil-transmitted parasitic intestinal worms that cause various diseases. These parasitic diseases cause significant deaths worldwide, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. In a previous mapping exercise conducted in Eswatini, it was discovered that 15% of school-going children were infected with bilharzia and 5.6% were infected with soil-transmitted diseases. Intestinal worms lead to malnutrition which significantly impair a child's ability to grow intellectually and physically.

To control parasites infestation, WHO recommends periodical deworming to eliminate infecting worms, health education to prevent re-infection, and improved sanitation to reduce soil contamination with infective eggs. Thus, the Kingdom of Eswatini committed to conduct the deworming exercise on annual basis, which supports WHO's ongoing agenda -

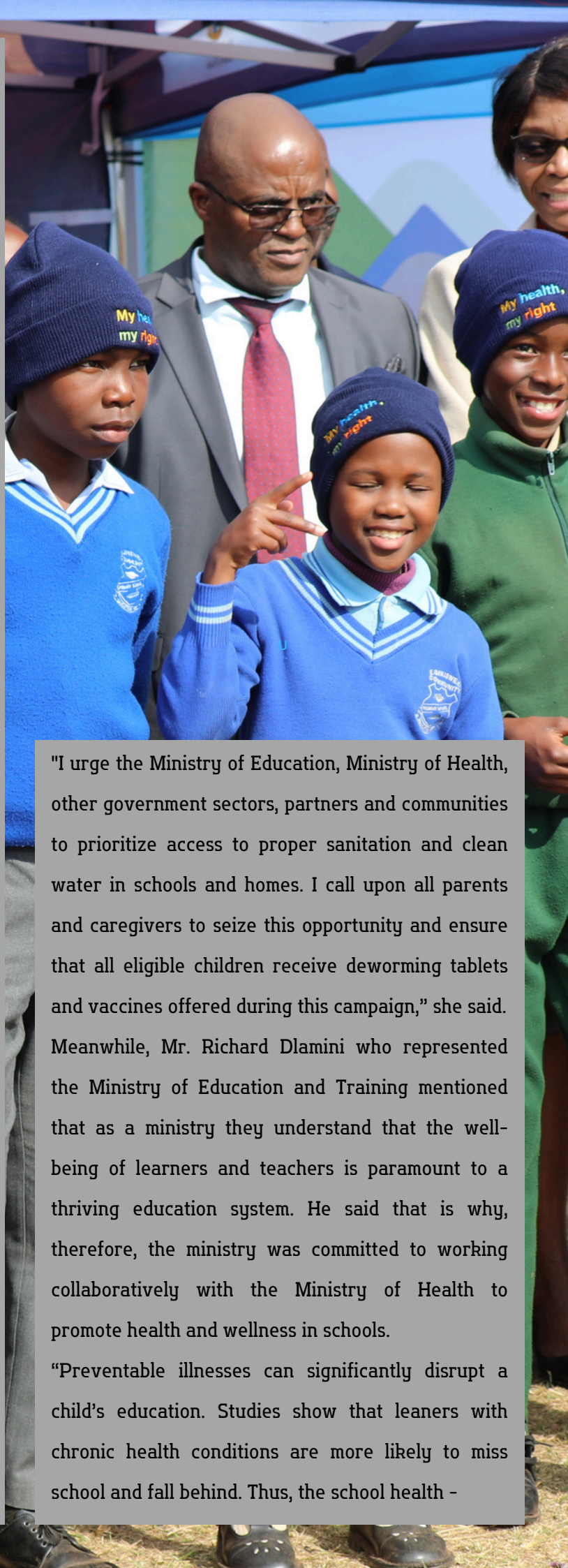
to eliminate neglected tropical diseases which are still a public health challenge in the African Region.

Meanwhile, Eswatini remains one of the countries in the world with high cervical cancer infections. Globally, cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women, with around 660 000 new cases in 2022. In Eswatini it is the leading cause of cancer related deaths among women. The Human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection, is the primary cause of cervical cancer, thus vaccination of young girls between 9-14 years remains a highly effective way of preventing HPV infection and cervical cancer.

During the launch of the campaign at Eqinisweni Primary School in the Manzini region, the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo congratulated the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Training for embarking on the joint campaign. Dr Tembo reiterated that all children deserve a life free from preventable diseases, adding that with the available vaccines, medicines and knowledge that goal can be attained.

“Let me remind you that all countries including Eswatini have committed to eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem by 2030, with targets including vaccinating 90% of girls with the HPV vaccine by age 15. Similarly, Soil-transmitted helminth (STH) infections are among the most common infections worldwide with an estimated 1.5 billion infected people or 24% of the world’s population (almost a quarter),” she said.

Dr Tembo extended gratitude to teachers, school Principals, school health and healthcare workers, as well as parents, families and communities for their commitment to providing children with both education and the health they deserve.



"I urge the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, other government sectors, partners and communities to prioritize access to proper sanitation and clean water in schools and homes. I call upon all parents and caregivers to seize this opportunity and ensure that all eligible children receive deworming tablets and vaccines offered during this campaign," she said. Meanwhile, Mr. Richard Dlamini who represented the Ministry of Education and Training mentioned that as a ministry they understand that the well-being of learners and teachers is paramount to a thriving education system. He said that is why, therefore, the ministry was committed to working collaboratively with the Ministry of Health to promote health and wellness in schools.

“Preventable illnesses can significantly disrupt a child’s education. Studies show that learners with chronic health conditions are more likely to miss school and fall behind. Thus, the school health -

services are essential in addressing these issues and creating a level playing field for all students,” he emphasized.

Ms. Rejoice Nkambule who represented the Minister of Health assured, teachers, parents and learners that: “These services are safe, and we have ensured that we have trained healthcare workers on standby for any additional support should a need arise,” Nkambule said.

These health services were received with warm hands by all parties including teachers, parents and learners. Teachers worked tirelessly to ensure that all learners are given consent forms to get them signed by their parents. Many parents consented for their children to receive these lifesaving interventions, which increased HPV coverage to about 73.1%.



## WHO SUPPORTS THE EPR FLAGSHIP SCOPING EXERCISE, MAKING ESWATINI THE 24TH COUNTRY TO CONDUCT THIS EXERCISE

The government of Eswatini, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) has conducted the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Scoping exercise, making Eswatini the 24th country in the African region to have conducted this exercise.

This exercise is part of the Regional Strategy for Health Security and Emergencies 2022–2030 which was adopted in 2022 at the WHO Regional Committee meeting. During this meeting, the Africa region launched three EPR initiatives aimed to assist member states in preparing for, promptly detecting, responding to, and recovering from outbreaks and other emergencies, contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3. These initiatives include the Prepare Initiative, which promotes Resilience of Systems for Emergencies (PROSE). The aim of the PROSE is to support member states to address gaps in International Health Regulation (IHR) capacities and strengthen countries' capacity to anticipate risks, plan for contingencies, and prepare human and financial resources in response to known and novel threats and

ensure that IHR core capacities are in place in the Member States. Secondly, the Detect Initiative - Transforming African Surveillance Systems (TASS) aims to reinvigorate stronger, integrated surveillance systems across Africa, enabling quicker detection and action to prevent or timely respond to outbreaks. Meanwhile, the Response Initiative, which is the Strengthening and Utilizing Response Groups for Emergencies (SURGE) aims to ensure that governments are equipped to mobilize resources and respond to public health emergencies within the first 24 - 48 hours.

A team of experts from the WHO Regional Office for Africa and HQ was in the country to guide and lead the scoping exercise in June 2024. The purpose of this exercise was to sensitize government and key stakeholders on the EPR initiatives, identify existing resources, gaps and priorities, review the national EPR capacities and determine the specific needs for coordinating the initiatives, and also draft a national costed roadmap for the rollout of the EPR initiatives.



From left to right: WR Dr Susan Tembo, His excellency Prime Minister Mr Russell Dlamini, WHO AFRO expert Dr Solomon Woldetsadih and the UN Resident Coordinator Mr George Wachira during the consultative meeting with the PM

Whilst in the country, the team, led by the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo met with national authorities including Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini, the Health Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, Ambassadors, International and Development partners, Academia and other in-country stakeholders to discuss the rollout of the initiatives and agree on a timeframe for the corresponding activities to be undertaken. The team of experts also conducted workshops for the different local pillars to identify strengths, gaps, and areas of improvement. A two-year costed roadmap was developed to build capacities to prevent, detect, prepare for and respond to public health emergencies in the country.

The WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo mentioned that the EPR Flagship Initiative is a testament to the global commitment to protecting public health in the face of adversity. “It is a comprehensive and dynamic approach that requires the collective effort of government, organizations, communities, and individuals. Together, we can build a resilient health sector capable of withstanding and recovering from emergencies, ensuring the well-being and safety of all,” she said.

Dr Tembo stated that collaboration with other sectors such as agriculture, education, environment, transport, and communication are vital in ensuring the implementation of one health approach. This holistic approach ensures a coordinated and comprehensive response to emergencies, leveraging the strengths and resources of each sector.

“The role of international cooperation and partnerships cannot be overlooked. Health emergencies do not respect borders, and our response must be global. By fostering collaborations with international organizations, governments, donors and NGOs, we can share knowledge, resources, and best practices, creating a unified front against common threats,” she said.

Making remarks during the launch of the scoping exercise in Mbabane, Minister of Health Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula highlighted that health security is a



Ministry of Health PS Mr Khanyakwezwe Mabuza shaking hands with the WHO AFRO team lead Dr Solomon Woldetsadik, while WR Dr Susan Tembo witnessed the launch of the report.

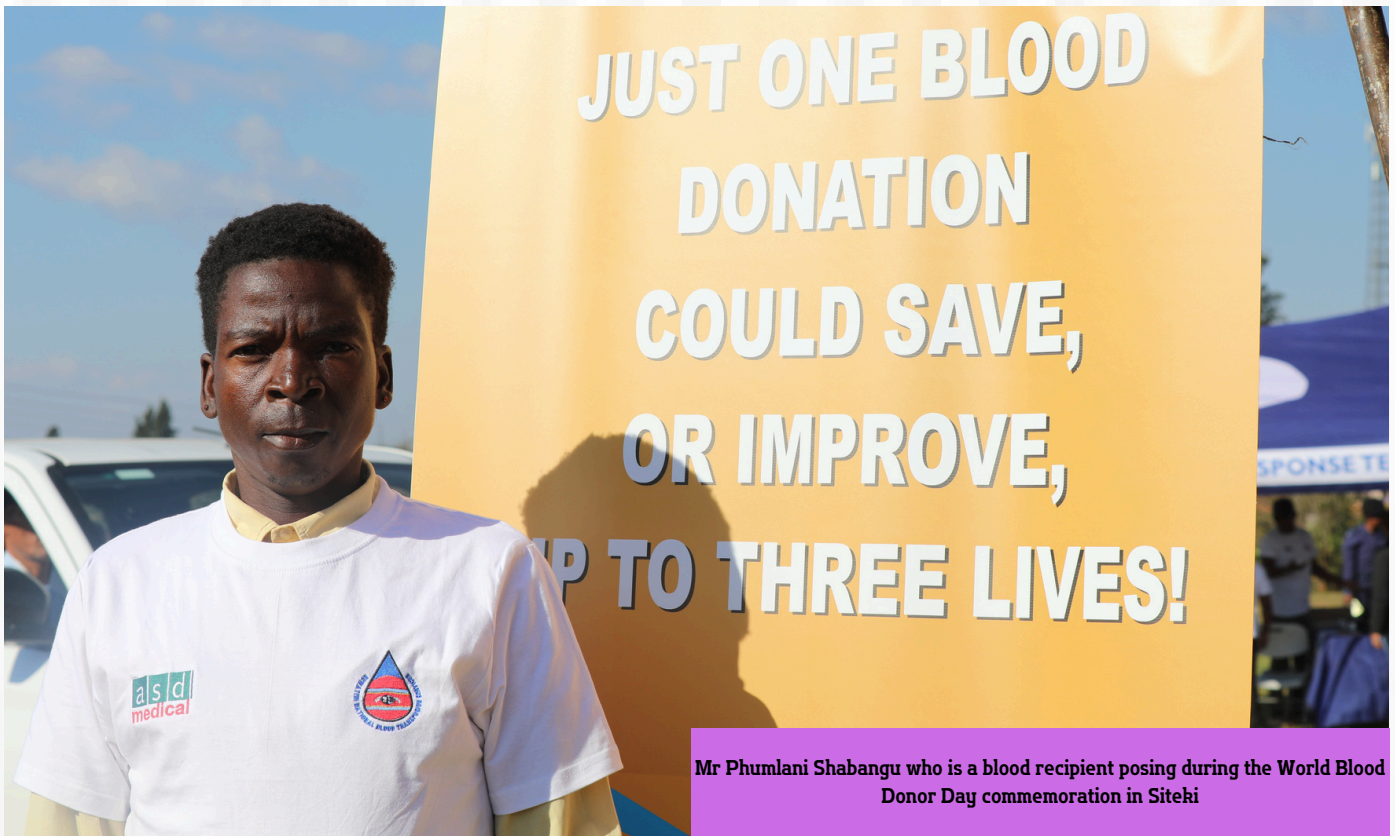


Some of the Ambassadors who were present during the consultative meeting in Mbabane

priority for the Kingdom of Eswatini. He mentioned that this is evidenced by the efforts made by the country in strengthening health emergencies through support from various partners and donors. Some of the visible milestones, the Minister stated, includes the development of high-level guiding documents such as the Strategic Toolkit for Assessing Risks (STAR) Report, National Health Emergency Response Operations Plan, Cholera specific contingency plans and Public Health Emergency Handbook & Standard Operating Procedures. Furthermore, the country has developed the required list of emergency stockpile and microplans required in preparation for the 12 multi-hazards identified in the STAR report. The Ministry together with its partners has also managed to test the readiness of the country towards response to an incident through conducting a full-scale simulation exercise (SIMEX) in November 2023.

All these initiatives have given the country headway towards strengthening investment in emergency preparedness and response.

## 47-YEAR-OLD BLOOD RECIPIENT APPRECIATES BLOOD DONORS FOR THEIR GIFT



Mr Phumlani Shabangu who is a blood recipient posing during the World Blood Donor Day commemoration in Siteki

Phumlani Shabangu, a 47-year-old male of Siteki says he has been receiving blood donation since 2008 following a condition that resulted in his body not producing enough blood for him to survive.

Speaking during the World Blood Donor Day commemoration at Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki, Shabangu exclaimed that he would lose his life if he does not receive the 8 pints of blood infusion that he requires each time he visits the hospital for blood transfusion.

World Blood Donor Day is commemorated on June 14 every year with the purpose of appreciating those that donate blood and also to encourage people to become regular blood donors. This year marks the 20th anniversary since the world started commemorating the World Blood Donor Day. The theme for this year's commemoration is "20 years of celebrating giving: thank you blood donors! This 20th anniversary is an excellent and timely opportunity to thank blood donors across the world for their life-saving donations over the years and honour the profound impact on both patients and donors. It is also a timely moment to address continued challenges and accelerate progress towards a future -

where safe blood transfusion is universally accessible.

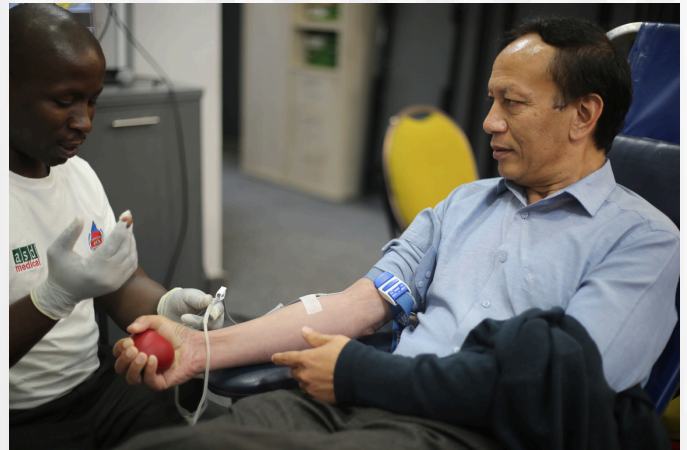
During the World Blood Donor Day commemoration, the Ministry of Health took the time to appreciate regular blood donors, who have over the years, saved the lives of many and give hope to people like Shabangu who said: "I always feel sad and afraid when I hear that there is no blood in the blood bank because that would mean I can lose my life."

Shabangu pleaded with the Ministry of Health and the government to invest in blood donation services, adding that there is no factory that produces blood. "If there was a firm that produces blood, I would ask government to provide us with insurance to source blood from that factory, but since that is not the case, I urge all Emaswati to give people like me, blood, because without their generous donations, we cannot survive. I am standing here today, making these remarks because of the love that you have showed me through your blood donations. Hence, we appreciate you blood donors. Without your donations I would not be alive today," Shabangu said.

## UN STAFF COMMEMORATE WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY

The United Nations staff in Eswatini also joined the annual commemoration of World Blood Donor Day. This was the eighth year since the UN started commemorating World Blood Donor Day where staff donate blood. Over 10 blood units were collected on the day. Making remarks during the UN World Blood Donor Day commemoration, WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo said “As we all know, blood cannot be bought, no matter how much money one may have, even with our medical aid, we still cannot buy blood. It is through the selfless act of people like us, that those in need, including ourselves, can access this life saving commodity- blood,” she said. The UN also thanked its own staff for having incorporated the World Blood Donor Day into the yearly calendar where UN staff donate blood.

WHO has over the years supported blood donation drives conducted by the Eswatini National Blood Transfusion Services and other public sensitization campaigns aimed at ensuring that the country collects enough blood for the benefit of all those in need.





## WHO HOSTS MULTI-SECTORAL DIALOGUE FOR HEALTH RIGHTS

The World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, other government sectors, civic society and the private sector convened during the commemoration of the World Health Day 2024 to share experiences of their contribution towards health as a right for the people of Eswatini.

This high-level meeting was attended by Minister of Health Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula, Ministry of Health Parliamentary Committee members, Heads of UN agencies, Heads of international NGOs and government partners. During this event, a panel discussion was held which comprised of officials from different sectors including agriculture, nutrition, housing, water and sanitation. These panelists made presentations on what each sector is doing to ensure that people access good quality health services. This was in line with this year's theme: "My Health, My Right". This was a good collaboration of all the sectors to ensure that each one of them understands their role towards quality health. This year's theme takes cognizant of some of the challenges faced and was chosen to -

champion the rights of everyone, everywhere to have access to health services, education, and information, as well as safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working and environmental conditions, and freedom from discrimination.

The annual commemoration of the World Health Day provides time to pause and think how far we have come in providing quality health services for the people, serving the vulnerable and preventing people from health emergencies. Health is a human right, and the right to health is a universal right of all human beings, regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or another status.

Around the world the right to health of millions is increasingly coming under threat from diseases, disasters and air pollution leading to death and disability. In addition, conflicts are devastating lives, causing death, pain, hunger and psychological distress.





Lamgabhi MP Hon. Sicelo Jele who is also a member of the Ministry of Health Parliamentary Portfolio Committee posing a question to the panelists

During this event, the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo reflected on the public health successes that have improved the quality of life for the people of Eswatini and in the region.

She noted that the African region has made significant progress in ensuring better health outcomes for the people over the past decade. More mothers and children are surviving today than before. From 2000 to 2020, the life expectancy of African women increased from 54 to 67 years; the maternal mortality ratio decreased by 33% (from 788 to 531 maternal deaths per 100 000 lives), and the number of children dying before the age of 5 was reduced by 50% from 2000 to 2017.

Between 2011 and 2021, the number of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths decreased by 44% and 55%, respectively, across Africa, and the number of TB deaths decreased by 26%. In addition, several diseases are on the verge of eradication and elimination, including polio, guinea worm disease, as well as maternal and neonatal tetanus.

In Eswatini, the first ANC attendance is at 98.6% and skilled birth attendance is at 93%. Life expectancy is now at 61 years.

The improvement of health services is further articulated in the recent evaluation of the National Health Sector -



The WR Dr Susan Tembo posing with Minister of Health Hon. Mduduzi Matsebula and other dignitaries

Strategic Plan implementation that showed overall performance of 77.78 % with the highest performance in managing medical and health conditions and in health emergencies preparedness and response.

“Let me applaud the Government of Eswatini for prioritization and re-commitment to Universal Health Coverage. During the high-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage during the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, the country committed to scale-up efforts to build and strengthen quality, people-centred, sustainable, and resilient health systems to enhance delivery of essential health services to Eswatini,” Dr Tembo said.

“Health is critical in today’s world. We need to recognize that well-being is an important component of our lives. Therefore, there is need to work on making sure that the right to health is exercised by improving the health seeking behavior and making healthy choices daily. I would encourage all of you on this World Health Day to pay attention to your health. So, as we celebrate World Health Day; I invite us to uphold the vision of the right of all people to attain the highest possible standard of health. We need to focus on improving access to quality health care at all levels, so that everyone has access, irrespective of their individual situations.”

# WORLD HEALTH DAY COMMUNITY OUTREACH



## WHO SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO ENSURE FOOD SAFETY FOR EMASWATI

The World Health Organization (WHO) has commended the government of Eswatini and the entire Ministry of Health for its commitment towards ensuring that all Emaswati are protected from food borne illnesses by raising awareness and putting standards which are enforced by the Eswatini Standards Authority that are aimed at maintaining the quality of the food consumed by Emaswati.

Speaking during the commemoration of World Food Safety Day in Manzini, the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo mentioned that in this sector, WHO has made meaningful contribution towards providing technical support to ensure food safety, capacity building for all sectors involved, hosting food safety awareness campaigns and supporting regular food inspections conducted by the Ministry of Health- Environmental Health Unit and conducting public awareness campaigns. Dr Tembo was represented by Health Systems Strengthening Officer Dr Mekdim Ayana. The World Food Safety Day is commemorated every 7 June, since 2019, and every year the world celebrates the myriad benefits of safe food. The campaign is jointly facilitated by WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

World Food Safety Day is aimed at raising awareness about the importance of food safety and inspire actions to help prevent, detect and manage food borne risks. This is a day to raise awareness about safe food practices and promote vigilance in preventing foodborne illnesses.

“On World Food Safety Day, we remember that food safety is a collective responsibility where everyone; from producers to consumers, needs to play their part” Dr Tembo said.



Panelists from different sectors involved in food safety making presentations on how they prepare for the unexpected to ensure food safety



Minister of Health Hon. Mduzuzi Matsebe posing with representatives from different stakeholders including WHO

This year the World Food Safety Day is commemorated under the theme “Prepare for the unexpected”. This theme emphasizes the importance of being prepared for food safety incidents, no matter how mild or severe they can be. Food safety incidents are situations where there is a potential or confirmed health risk associated with food consumption. A food incident can happen, for example, due to accidents, inadequate controls, food fraud or natural events.

Food Safety is a crucial component of food security and plays a vital role in reducing food diseases. Every day, on average, 1 600 000 people get sick due to unsafe food, contaminated with bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical substances.

Every year, 600 million people fall sick as a result of around 200 different types of foodborne illness. The burden of such illness falls most heavily on the poor and on the young. In addition, foodborne illness is responsible for 420 000 preventable deaths every year. Food safety hazards do not recognize borders, so in an increasingly interconnected global food supply, risks posed by unsafe food can rapidly evolve from a local problem to an international emergency.

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that the food we eat is safe. Governments need to develop and regularly update national food safety emergency response plans and use “lessons learned” from food safety events to identify gaps and limitations. Agriculture and food producers need to adopt good practice; Food operators need to establish and regularly update food safety management plans, and consumers need to practice safe food handling at home and follow WHO's Five Keys to Safer Food: keep clean, separate raw and cooked, cook thoroughly, keep food at safe temperatures and use safe water and raw materials.

The event involved various stakeholders involved in matters of food safety, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Eswatini Standards Authority and the Consumer Forum. There was a discussion on food safety, focusing on roles played by key players to ensure food safety and how the country can improve to ensure that food which gets to consumers does not compromise their health.

Minister of Health Mduduzi Matsebula stressed the importance of not just having food in abundance, but having safe food fit for human consumption to ensure the good health of Eswatini. He said that this entailed collaborated efforts between aligned government -

ministries, parastatals and other relevant organizations. During the panel discussion, Chairperson of the Eswatini Consumer Forum Mandla Ntshakala lamented that the country does not have consumer rights legislation. Ntshakala said people are sold expired food, adding that food inspectors do their work in ensuring that food premises are inspected and graded, but there is need to strengthen legislation that ensures compliance and food safety.

Ms. Melagrosa Mondlane from the Eswatini Standards Authority emphasized that for Eswatini to prepare for the unexpected, there is need to implement a robust and resilient food safety management system which can be done by implementing the food safety standards which cut across - from the producer to the consumer. She mentioned however, that their lab capacity is limited, including shortage of human resource. “Most of our food comes from outside the country, hence we need to ensure that all food that comes in is tested for residues, but we do not have enough human resources to conduct these tests,” she said. Making remarks, the Minister of Health Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula said: “Just imagine what may happen to our already overstretched health system if contamination can occur during the process of food preparation. We cannot be able to effectively handle such a situation, and we do not want to experience it. Food safety is, therefore, an integral factor to ensure that the food we eat is safe for consumption. If food is not handled in a safe manner, it can also be another source of diarrhoea and other food related diseases. In view of that, it is important to emphasize on the WHO's 5 keys to safer food: Keep clean; Separate cooked and uncooked food; Cook food properly; Keep food at safe temperatures; Use safe water and raw materials.”

## HANDWASHING DROPPED DRASTICALLY AFTER COVID



One of the Good Shepherd Hospital Nurses demonstrating the proper way to wash hands using soap and water

Quality Assurance Manager in the Ministry of Health Mr. Thabang Masangane has noted that handwashing has significantly dropped even at the health facility. Masangane mentioned this during the commemoration of World Handwashing Day which was supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) at Good Shepherd Hospital in the Lubombo region, where over 70 healthcare workers in the Lubombo region were reminded about the importance of handwashing in healthcare.

World Handwashing Day is commemorated on the 5th May every year. During this commemoration, health care workers including Nursing students from the Good Shepherd Nursing College were given information about the importance of observing the WHO's five moments for handwashing as they care for their patients. Hand hygiene is critical in the provision of health services and

is critical in preventing infections. It helps to reduce the spread of harmful bacteria and viruses. With clean hands, health workers can offer clean and safe care and protect themselves and their patients from infections.

Globally, health care associated infections affect more than 1 million people at any given time. Hand hygiene is a highly effective way to prevent infections. However, it is estimated that only 40% of the health care workers practice correct hand hygiene.

Masangane mentioned that during a spot check at the Central Medical Stores, they found that hand sanitizers are sitting there since health facilities are no longer ordering them, unlike during the COVID pandemic where sanitizers were flying-off the shelf.

“Hand hygiene standards at the facility level are not met, with observed shortage of essential requirements such as soap, water and paper towels. What we have also -

observed is that hand washing station are inadequate,” he said.

Masangane stated that most facilities have designated Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) officers but these officers also have many other duties such that they have little time to observe whether hand washing is being done or not. He said this compromises the practice of hand washing. “We advocate for the Regional Health Administrators to ensure that there is critical infrastructure in all facilities so that hand hygiene levels are maintained. They should ensure that there is back up water tanks and also advocate for laws to ensure -

that facilities have everything they need to wash hands. Businesspeople are also encouraged to plough back by providing hand hygiene essentials such as water stations and soap,” he said.

Masangane also urged hospital administrators to ensure that they monitor hand hygiene and provide supplies and ensure that there are designated officers who are looking at hand hygiene issues. He also pleaded with the media to advocate for hand hygiene in hospitals.

“Let us clean our hands at critical times, following the five moments as stated by WHO,” he said.



## ESWATINI ON HIGH ALERT AS MPOX CASES INCREASE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Ministry of Health in Eswatini has heightened its emergency management systems in response to the escalating Mpox cases in neighboring South Africa. Given Eswatini's geographical proximity and frequent cross-border movement with South Africa, the potential for disease transmission is high.

Since June 2022, South Africa has reported over 25 Mpox cases, with 16 confirmed cases, including three fatalities, notified to the World Health Organization (WHO) as of June 26, 2024. These cases, predominantly affecting men aged 23 to 43 years, have emerged from three provinces, with no reported recent travel to Mpox outbreak regions, suggesting local transmission. These cases have been reported from KwaZulu-Natal with eight cases and two deaths, Gauteng with seven cases and one death, and the Western Cape with one case.

While Eswatini has so far recorded two suspected Mpox cases, which both back negative and the WHO continues to provide and develop technical guidelines to respond to Mpox across all pillars. This includes global and regional situational updates, support for readiness assessments, and assistance in developing a comprehensive Mpox contingency plan.

Mpox, a notifiable disease, is one of the 13 public health threats monitored through the country's weekly surveillance system. In response to the current situation, the country has implemented key interventions including heightened surveillance activities, public health education on infectious diseases including Mpox, increased screening at points of entry, and strengthening of local public health laboratory capacity. Health facilities are being sensitized on Mpox case management through workshops and clinical forums.

Regional Public Health Emergency Response Teams are also being convened for sensitization on case investigation and contact tracing of suspected cases.

In a press statement by Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula, the Minister of Health, urges the public to remain vigilant. Emphasis is placed on infection prevention and control measures, including hand hygiene, isolation, and reduced contact with infected individuals. The public is also advised to seek immediate medical attention if they experience any suspected symptoms of Mpox.

"WHO has supported the country to conduct Mpox readiness assessment using the WHO Mpox checklist and will provide guidance on identified gaps from the exercise. We remain on high alert and ready to offer technical support to the Ministry of Health" – WHO Representative, Dr Susan Tembo

More information on [Monkeypox \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int)





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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