

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

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Keeping blood pressure under control is vital for a healthy heart

February is American Heart Month

A growing number of Missouri residents are suffering from high blood pressure, one of the major risk factors for heart disease.

More than 29 percent of adults in Missouri reported having high blood pressure in 2007, up from just over 27 percent a decade earlier, according to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. The prevalence of high blood pressure is a major reason that heart disease ranks as Missouri's leading cause of death.

To commemorate February as American Heart Month, state health officials are urging Missourians to get their blood pressure checked regularly to help prevent heart disease.

"Getting your blood pressure checked is one of the simplest – and most important – medical tests you can have done," said Anita Berwanger, manager of the health department's Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program. "If your blood pressure is high, you need to take steps to get it under control."

High blood pressure is sometimes called the "silent killer" because it often has no symptoms until serious problems develop. In addition to damaging the heart, high blood pressure can impair other major organs including the kidneys and eyes.

A normal blood pressure reading is 120/80, while a blood pressure level greater than 140/90 is high. A person whose blood pressure falls between those levels is considered to have pre-hypertension and is at risk of developing high blood pressure.

People of all ages can have high blood pressure. A person is at greater risk for developing high blood pressure if they:

- Are overweight or obese
- Have high blood cholesterol
- Have diabetes
- Consume too much salt and not enough potassium
- Drink too much alcohol
- Smoke

Missourians can take several steps to keep their blood pressure at a healthy level:

- Have your blood pressure checked regularly. If it is high, be sure to follow your doctor's recommendations for treating it.
- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Monitor your cholesterol levels.
- Control diabetes.
- Be physically active.
- Eat a healthy diet to promote a healthy weight.
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol use.

"Healthy lifestyle choices are the best way to keep your blood pressure under control and prevent heart disease," Berwanger said. "Maintaining your blood pressure at a healthy level can help add years to your life."

More information about heart disease and high blood pressure can be found at:
www.dhss.mo.gov/HeartDisease/ and www.dhss.mo.gov/HighBloodPressure/.