
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

TWO MINUTES THAT CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE

VICTORIA – Approximately one in six British Columbians know they have high blood pressure, but many more people are unaware of their condition and would benefit from a simple, two-minute test, said Health Minister George Abbott as he kicked off Hypertension Awareness Week.

“Knowing what your blood pressure is, healthy eating and moderate exercise are important and simple steps we can all take to help reduce our health risks,” said Abbott. “Through our ActNow BC initiatives, government is promoting healthy choices, and providing support for each of us to improve our quality of life.”

Approximately 650,000 people in B.C. know they have hypertension, also known as high blood pressure. May 8 marks the start of Hypertension Awareness Week, and is a reminder for all of us to invest two minutes to check a very important number, our blood pressure.

High blood pressure, often referred to as the “silent killer,” has no obvious symptoms and most people cannot tell whether their own blood pressure is high unless it is measured. Uncontrolled, high blood pressure increases the risk of stroke, heart failure, kidney failure, and heart attack. As blood pressure increases, the risk of it causing these problems also increases.

“Worldwide, over one and a half billion people suffer from hypertension,” noted Dr. Arun Chockalingam, secretary general of the World Hypertension League and Simon Fraser University Health Sciences professor. “Only about one-third of hypertensive people are treated and approximately 12 per cent of those treated are controlled.”

The Heart and Stroke Foundation BC & Yukon outlines several factors that contribute to high blood pressure, including:

- Age: About half of people over the age of 65 have high blood pressure;
- Stress: Repeated exposure to stress may raise blood pressure levels
- Cigarette smoking and excessive alcohol consumption;
- Obesity: Excessive weight is a risk factor, and;
- Ethnicity: The incidence of high blood pressure is higher among members of some ethnic groups, such as South Asians, First Nations, Aboriginal Peoples or Inuit, and Black Canadians.

In B.C., a large percentage of health-care resources are used for chronic disease management, with five per cent of patients using more than 30 per cent of physician services. Reducing chronic disease by maintaining healthy blood pressure is one way British Columbians can all support high-quality health care for our province.

Government is increasing access to primary health-care services and improving management of complex chronic diseases. This has the potential to reduce the downstream demand for acute care/emergency services and improve patient care and outcomes.

If you have any questions or are concerned about high blood pressure, the BC HealthGuide Program provides reliable health information and advice, including information on lifestyle steps to lowering blood pressure. The BC HealthGuide is a self-care program available 24 hours every day with the BC HealthGuide Handbook, BC NurseLine (telephone 1-866-215-4700 or, within Greater Vancouver, 604-215-4700), BC HealthFiles, a website at www.bchealthguide.org to help British Columbians better understand and manage their health.

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