



# NEWS

R E L E A S E

Illinois Department of Public Health

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**CONTACT:**

Melaney Arnold (217) 558-0500

Kelly Jakubek (312) 520-5242

[www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)

## **Number One Killer of American Women – Heart Disease Kills One Out of Every Four Women**

### *How to reduce the risk – action plan*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois Department of Public Health is encouraging Illinoisans to celebrate National Wear Red Day® on Friday, Feb. 4, 2011, and raise awareness that heart disease is the leading killer of U.S. women. Almost every minute a woman in the U.S. dies from heart disease. According to an American Heart Association report, more women than men have died of heart disease each year since 1984 and women have a 28 percent increased risk of dying within the first year after a heart attack, compared to men. Yet only 55 percent of women realize heart disease is their number one killer and less than half know what are considered healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

“The first Friday in February every year is the day when people across the country can send a big, red wake-up call to women, encouraging them to learn about their risk of heart disease and take action to prevent it,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold. “I recommend women take three steps to lower their risk of heart disease. One – learn about heart disease and the risk factors. Two – talk with a doctor about tests and screenings. Three – develop a plan of how to reduce the risks.”

### **1. Education**

Heart disease is a disorder of the blood vessels of the heart that can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. Heart disease is a lifelong condition - once you get it, you'll always have it.

Risk factors that make a person more likely to develop a disease include:

- ❖ High blood pressure
- ❖ High blood cholesterol
- ❖ Diabetes
- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Being overweight
- ❖ Being physically inactive
- ❖ Having a family history of early heart disease
- ❖ Age (55 or older for women)

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Although significant progress has been made in increasing awareness among women (34 percent in 2000 to 69 percent in 2009), most women fail to make the connection between risk factors and their personal risk of developing heart disease.

## **2. Doctor**

Talk with your doctor about heart disease. Questions you can ask include:

- ❖ What is my risk for heart disease?
- ❖ What is my blood pressure? What do I need to do about it?
- ❖ What are my cholesterol numbers? What do I need to do about them?
- ❖ What are my “body mass index” and waist measurement? Do they mean that I need to lose weight for my health?
- ❖ What is my blood sugar level and what do I need to do about it?
- ❖ What other screening tests for heart disease do I need?
- ❖ How much physical activity do I need to help protect my heart?
- ❖ What is a heart healthy eating plan for me?

## **3. Action Plan**

You can significantly lower your risk of heart disease by leading a healthy lifestyle. Create an action plan specific to you that include healthy eating, physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking.

- ❖ **Healthy Eating:** Dietary guidelines recommend emphasizing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; choose foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and sodium, and added sugars.
- ❖ **Physical Activity:** To reduce the risk of disease, you need about 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. If you’re trying to manage your weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy weight gain, try to boost that level to approximately 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity on most days of the week.
- ❖ **Healthy Weight:** Losing weight will directly lower your risk of heart disease and other serious conditions. Even a small weight loss will help, but at the very least you should not gain any additional weight. A recent study found that young adults who maintain their weight over time, even if they are overweight, have lower risk factors for heart disease in middle age.
- ❖ **No Smoking:** Cigarette smoking increases the risk of coronary heart disease by itself. When it acts with other factors, it greatly increases risk. Become aware of your personal smoking “triggers” - the situations that typically bring on the urge to light up -and replace them with new activities. You also may want to participate in an organized program to help people quit smoking, offered by many hospitals, health organizations, and workplaces.

While heart disease risk begins to rise in middle age, heart disease develops over time and can start at a young age, even in the teen years. It's never too early, or too late, to take action to prevent and control the risk factors for heart disease.