Protect Your Heart

A healthy lifestyle can help protect you from heart disease, LA County's no. 1 killer

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health encourages residents to protect themselves from heart disease through healthy lifestyle choices. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Los Angeles County, and a major cause of disability.

"Roughly every 25 seconds an American has a coronary event, and roughly every minute an American dies from one," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "The good news, however, is that most heart attacks are preventable."

While some heart disease risk factors—such as age, gender and family history—cannot be modified, many others are under your control. Modifiable risk factors include cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, being overweight or obese, and physical inactivity. Target these risk factors by coupling a healthy diet with regular physical activity, and avoid smoking.

"Heart disease prevention begins with awareness," said Dr. Fielding. "Know which risk factors you have and take steps to control them. Get active, eat right, quit smoking and have regular medical examinations."

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense; however, most heart attacks start slowly with mild pain or discomfort. Often people who are affected are not sure what is wrong and wait too long before getting help. Signs that you are having a heart attack include

- **Chest discomfort** - Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.

- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body** - Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

- **Shortness of breath** - This may occur with or without chest discomfort.

- **Other signs** - These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you suspect you are having a heart attack.

In 2009, according to the CDC, an estimated 785,000 Americans had a new coronary attack, and about 470,000 had a recurrent attack. That year, the financial cost of cardiovascular diseases and stroke in the U.S. was estimated at $475.3 billion, according to the American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. This includes both direct costs—such as physicians, hospitals, and nursing home services

—as well as indirect costs, including lost productivity resulting from illness and death. The true cost, in terms of human suffering and lost lives, is incalculable.

The Public Health Department works to engage cities and raise awareness of the problem by releasing a city and community report on premature deaths from heart disease and stroke that is available at http://lapublichealth.org/epi/docs/CHR_CVH.pdf Additionally, the Department's Prevention Matters campaign offers a hotline for qualifying women to receive referrals to free or low-cost health resources, available by calling 1-800-793-8090. For individuals who would like to quit smoking, the Department has partnered with Ralphs and L.A. Care Health Plan to give away 30,000 smoking cessation aids to residents of LA County. Details of that initiative are available at http://laquits.com/

More information about heart health, including other prevention resources, can be found online at
- www.publichealth.lacounty.gov
- www.americanheart.org
- www.cdc.gov/features/heartmonth
- www.nhibi.nih.gov

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding $750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit http://publichealth.lacounty.gov and our YouTube channel at http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth