February 2012

February is American Heart Month, so this issue of *Health and Safety News* is dedicated to heart health. Topics addressed will range from The National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network to loving your heart to lowering sodium intake. The information in the newsletter comes directly from the CDC’s website ([http://www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)), so for additional information about topics presented in this edition or any other health and safety related topic, please visit that site. Also, for more information related to topics highlighted in blue, click on the link to receive greater detail.

Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the U.S. and a major cause of disability. About one of every four deaths in the U.S. is caused by heart disease. We have long known that things like lack of exercise and poor diet can increase the risk of heart disease. We are discovering that how good or bad the air we breathe affects heart health also.

**Heart Health and Air Pollution**

People who breathe very small bits of air pollution (fine particle pollution) either short term or long term have a greater risk of heart disease than people who do not breathe this kind of air pollution. Fine particle pollution, also known as particulate matter 2.5 (PM$_{2.5}$), is made by burning fossil fuels. It is dangerous because it is made up of tiny particles that are small enough to be inhaled deeply into your lungs, where they can affect the heart, lungs, and blood vessels.
Look for data about your area

The National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) is helping us understand how the environment and heart health in America are connected. The Tracking Network is a tool that can help us estimate how solving one problem can help solve the other. For example, according to studies and estimates available on the Tracking Network, reducing fine particle pollution by 10% could prevent more than 13,000 deaths every year across the nation.

The Tracking Network makes it easy to see information and recognize factors about certain community qualities that may cause a higher risk of heart problems related to air pollution. These factors include issues like a high rate of poverty, more people without insurance, higher exposure to auto exhaust due to more people living in the community, and more. These risk factors are associated with more heart and lung problems, hospital visits, and deaths in areas with high amounts of air pollution.

Reduce your risk

This information can be used to help public health officials give these communities the help they most need, such as policies that keep the air clean. In addition, there are six easy tips you can use to help protect your heart from the effects of air pollution:

- Know what your risk for cardiovascular disease is and how sensitive you are to air pollution.
- Know when air pollution may be high in your area and reduce your exposure. Use the Air Quality Index to get accurate information.
- Plan activities when and where pollution levels are lower.
- Listen to your body.
- See your health care provider when you need to.
- Keep your medication with you.

Visit CDC's Tracking Network to learn more about air pollution and heart disease.

Love Your Heart

February is filled with heart-clad images celebrating Valentine's Day. Although the history and evolution of Valentine's Day are attributed to a number of different legends, what is certain is that February 14 is associated with love, care, and the heart. Nearly 50 years ago, February was designated as
American Heart Month, which has further cemented the heart as an ever-present symbol during this month. This national observance raises awareness about the risks of heart disease and lifestyle changes that can reduce cardiovascular risks and promote healthy hearts. The Million Hearts™ Campaign, recently launched by the Department of Health and Human Services to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes over 5 years, is also keeping heart health in the forefront at this time.

Given that February is recognized as a time to celebrate love, caring, and heart health, what better time to improve your own heart health or encourage loved ones to improve theirs by quitting smoking? About 130,000 cardiovascular disease deaths per year in the United States are attributable to smoking. Also, approximately 26% of heart attacks and 12-19% of strokes are attributable to smoking. The Surgeon General has concluded that cigarette smoking greatly increases one's risk for heart disease. Being smoke-free and eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke is important to heart health.

**Smoking and Heart Health**

When you smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke, cells that line your body's blood vessels react to the poisons in tobacco smoke almost immediately. Your heart rate and blood pressure go up. Your blood vessels grow narrower. Chemical changes caused by tobacco smoke also make blood more likely to clot. Clots can form and block blood flow to your heart.

Smoking is one cause of dangerous plaque buildup inside your arteries. Plaque clogs and narrows your arteries. This can trigger chest pain, weakness, heart attack, or stroke. Plaque can rupture and cause clots that block arteries. Completely blocked arteries can cause sudden death. Smoking is not the only cause of these problems, but it makes them much worse.

**Secondhand Smoke and Heart Health**

Tobacco smoke hurts anyone who breathes it. When you breathe secondhand smoke, platelets in your blood get sticky and may form clots, just like in a person who smokes. Research shows that even
spending time in a smoky room could trigger a heart attack. There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Even brief exposure can be harmful to your health, especially if you are at risk for heart disease.

**Quitting Saves Lives**

You have years of life to gain and love to give by quitting smoking. Your risk for heart attack drops sharply just 1 year after you quit smoking. In fact, even if you've already had a heart attack, you cut your risk of having another one by a third to a half if you quit smoking. And because secondhand smoke also affects others and can increase their risk for heart attack and death, quitting smoking can help protect your loved ones. Make an effort during this heartfelt holiday to stop smoking and/or to encourage your loved ones to stop smoking.

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**Where's the sodium? There's too much in many common foods.**

For American Heart Month, the February edition of CDC *Vital Signs* focuses on the amount of sodium in Americans’ diets and what we can do to reduce it. Too much sodium increases a person's risk for high blood pressure. High blood pressure often leads to heart disease, stroke, and other vascular diseases.

Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods and foods prepared in restaurants. Sodium is already part of processed foods and cannot be removed. Learn what you can do to reduce sodium in your diet.

**Highlights from the Report:**

- About 90% of Americans eat more sodium than is recommended for a healthy diet.
- Reducing the sodium Americans eat by 1,200 mg per day on average could save up to $20 billion a year in medical costs.
- Types of foods matter—More than 40% of sodium comes from the following 10 types of foods: breads and rolls, cold cuts and cured meats such as deli or packaged ham or turkey, pizza, fresh and processed poultry, soups, sandwiches such as cheeseburgers, cheese, pasta dishes*, meat mixed dishes such as meat loaf with tomato sauce, and snacks such as chips, pretzels, and popcorn.
- Brands of foods matter too. Different brands of the same foods may have different sodium levels. For example, sodium in chicken noodle soup can vary by as much as 840 milligrams (mg) per serving.
• About 65% of sodium eaten comes from food bought at retail stores, so look for lower sodium choices. About 25% comes from restaurants, and it can be hard for a person to tell how much sodium is in restaurant foods.

• Americans eat on average about 3,300 mg of sodium a day. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend limiting sodium to less than 2,300 mg a day, and about 6 out of 10 adults should further limit sodium to 1,500 mg a day.**

*The pasta dishes category does not include macaroni and cheese. Macaroni and cheese is its own category.


Eating Less Sodium is a Challenge

It can be challenging to reduce sodium in the diet because it can be included in foods in surprising ways. In fact, foods that otherwise seem healthy may have high levels of sodium (e.g., cottage cheese and turkey breast luncheon meat). Some foods that you eat several times a day, such as bread, add up to a lot of sodium even though each serving is not high in sodium. There are steps that you can take, however, to reduce sodium in your diet.

What Can Be Done

The issue of CDC Vital Signs includes ways that sodium can be reduced in diets:

Places that produce, sell, or serve food can:

• Consider joining voluntary initiatives to reduce sodium such as the National Salt Reduction Initiative (http://www.nyc.gov/health/salt)
• Give choices to consumers to help them reduce sodium in their diet by:
  o Stocking lower sodium foods.
  o Asking food manufacturers to provide lower sodium foods.
• Make phased reductions in the amount of sodium they add to foods they sell or serve.
• Limit the amount of sodium in food products.
• Provide information about sodium in foods.

FYI- Check out the following link to find out what you can do!

http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/index.html