



News Release

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Three simple questions can help identify someone having a stroke

Stroke awareness campaign targets African Americans

OLYMPIA — Would you know if a friend, loved one, or even a stranger were having a stroke? The window of time to successfully treat the effects of a stroke and slow or limit brain damage is estimated at only three hours from the first symptom.

The Department of Health, in partnership with the American Stroke Association, is mounting an awareness campaign beginning in May to help people recognize if someone might be having a stroke. Because African Americans have one of the highest rates of disability and death due to stroke, the awareness campaign will target several African-American communities around Puget Sound. The campaign highlights Signs of Stroke – S.O.S. – simplified to three easy-to-remember questions that can be asked:

1. Smile (look for one-sided facial weakness)
2. Raise both arms (look for them to be raised at the same height)
3. Speak a simple sentence (listen for slurring)

If someone cannot do even one of these tasks, the person may be having a stroke. Call 9-1-1 immediately – minutes can make the difference. Stroke is a leading cause of death and serious long-term disability. About 10 people die from stroke each day in Washington.

“Learning to recognize if someone is having a stroke can become second nature to people,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “If we can rely on each other to identify a stroke more quickly, we can help people recover and save lives.”

Although most people who experience stroke are in their 60s, 70s, 80s or older – stroke can occur at any age. Treatment can reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if help arrives within three hours of the first symptom. The awareness campaign encourages people to ask the questions. Call 9-1-1.

What is stroke?

Stroke affects the arteries that deliver oxygen and other nutrients to the brain. Someone affected by stroke might have difficulty speaking, lose the ability to lift their arms or walk, have difficulty seeing in one or both eyes, experience numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, and can quickly lose consciousness. Quick action and medical attention can minimize permanent brain damage and potentially save someone's life.

The good news is that stroke is largely preventable. Those at highest risk of stroke are people with high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, high blood cholesterol, tobacco use, or obesity. Other risk factors are physical inactivity, excessive alcohol use, and illegal drug use.

The stroke awareness campaign in May – which is Stroke Awareness Month – includes radio and newspaper advertising, information and outreach to African-American churches and community centers in western Washington, and mailings to homes. Churches involved are part of the American Heart Association's Search Your Heart project, which promotes healthy living to church members.

For more information, call the Department of Health at 1-888-438-2247, or see the [Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Web page](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/heart_stroke/default.htm) (http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/heart_stroke/default.htm).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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