

Would you know a stroke if you saw one?

By State Health Officer Maxine Hayes, M.D.

Bumps, bruises, rashes, coughs and other symptoms of health problems can be easily recognized by just about anybody. Detecting potential killers such as heart attack and stroke can be more difficult to recognize. Yet recognizing the often subtle signs of a brain attack (stroke) or heart attack and getting immediate medical attention can make a life-or-death difference. Minutes matter!

Most people are familiar with heart attacks, and many know what to do. But strokes are different; would you know a stroke if you saw one?

Stroke is a leading cause of death and serious, long-term disability in Washington. Although most of those who experience stroke are in their 60s, 70s, 80s and older – stroke can occur at any age. In Washington, about 10 people die from stroke every day.

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 reduce permanent brain damage and disability and potentially save someone's life.

It is important for everyone to know how to identify a stroke and when to call 9-1-1 for help. This is especially important for African Americans, who have among the highest rates of disability and death due to stroke.

There are three simple tasks that everyone should know to help identify a stroke. If you suspect someone is having a stroke, ask them to do these things:

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 a person cannot do even one of these tasks, the person may be experiencing a stroke. Call 9-1-1 immediately. Minutes can make the difference. 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.

Smile, raise arms, and speak a sentence. Remember these three simple things and share your knowledge with others. Something this simple can be critical to helping our family, friends and loved ones.

Dr. Maxine Hayes, State Health Officer

Visit www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/heart_stroke/default.htm for more information.