

House Republican Press Release

September 23, 2008
Press Office: 860-240-8700

REP. GIEGLER ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO TAKE NOTE OF 'CHOLESTEROL AWARENESS MONTH'



State Rep. Janice Giegler (R-Danbury, New Fairfield) today encouraged residents to take note that September is Cholesterol Awareness Month. Rep. Giegler serves as a member of the Legislature's Public Health Committee and recently recorded a public service announcement for the National Women In Government organization discussing the importance of awareness and heart disease prevention. Rep. Giegler serves as Connecticut State Director for the organization, which is comprised of women state legislators from throughout the United States.

According to Women in Government, High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD) and heart attack. Heart disease is the number one killer of men and women in the United States. Each year, more than a million people suffer from heart attacks, and nearly a half million additional individuals die from heart disease. Each year more women die from heart disease, stroke, and cardiovascular disease than men. When healthcare providers were surveyed, only eight percent of primary care physicians were aware that more women than men die from heart disease, demonstrating a lack of awareness of the risk among women.

Cholesterol naturally occurs in humans. It is a fatty-like substance found in the bloodstream and throughout all of the body's cells. Cholesterol is used by the body for producing cell membranes, certain hormones, and general functioning. There are three forms of cholesterol that physicians monitor to measure the risk of CVD. The first is HDL-C (high density lipoprotein cholesterol) which is the good form of cholesterol; a higher level means lower risk for CVD. A second type of cholesterol is LDL-C (low density lipoprotein cholesterol) which is the bad form of cholesterol; a higher level means higher risk for CVD. Lastly, triglycerides, which are a form of fat, are measured. Individuals with high triglyceride levels often also have high total cholesterol levels and increased risk for CVD.

When high-levels of LDL cholesterol are present in the blood, it builds up the walls of arteries, preventing blood from freely flowing. As a result, the blood flow is slowed down or blocked, preventing oxygen from reaching the heart. If significant blood supply is cut off from the heart, a heart attack occurs.

High LDL blood cholesterol levels do not often produce negative symptoms, suggesting that individual's should regularly monitor their cholesterol levels. Cholesterol lowering is important to monitor regardless of age. Many things affect cholesterol levels. Some risk factors are controllable while others are not. Uncontrollable risk factors include age, gender and heredity. As people get older, their cholesterol levels naturally rise, and this rise can be influenced by genetics. High blood cholesterol can run in families so it is important to know your family medical history.

There are other risk factors that are controllable by individual behavior changes. Controlling diet and eating "heart healthy" foods can significantly decrease the amount of LDL and increase the amount of HDL in the body. This is done by reducing the intake of saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol and sodium, and by increasing the intake of fruits, vegetables, whole-grain and high-fiber foods. By checking the nutrition guidelines on food labels and being conscious of what you eat, you can lower your bad cholesterol. Eating a healthy diet, which also helps maintain a healthy weight, is essential to reducing the risk of heart disease. Physical activity, which can also help you lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, is also important in lowering bad cholesterol. You should try to be physically active for 30 minutes every day.

Ideal LDL levels are those below 100 for people at high risk of heart disease, and 100 to 129 for those not at high risk. For HDL, levels of 60 and higher are best to reduce the likelihood of heart disease. In sum, your cholesterol total should be less than 200. Talk to your doctor about good and bad cholesterol and the healthy levels you need to avoid your risk of heart disease, and always know your numbers to reduce the risk of CVD.