

Let Us Help Save Your Life
Protecting Yourself Against Heart Attack and Stroke
By June R. Wallace

Heart disease is America's No. 1 killer. Stroke is No. 3 and a leading cause of disability. Every 45 seconds, someone in the U.S. suffers a stroke and that person often is Black. In fact, African-Americans are twice as likely as Caucasians to suffer strokes. By educating yourself on the warning signs of heart attack and stroke, you not only will learn ways to prevent these deadly conditions, but also increase your chances of positive outcomes if heart attacks or strokes do occur.

The warning signs of heart attack include: chest discomfort; pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach; shortness of breath; breaking out in a cold sweat; nausea; and/or lightheadedness. If you have one or more of these symptoms, you should contact your physician immediately. If you do not have a personal or family physician, you should be seen at the nearest urgent-care facility as soon as possible.

The warning signs of stroke include: sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, especially if it occurs on one side of the body; sudden confusion; trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking; dizziness; loss of balance or coordination; and/or sudden, severe headache with no known cause. Again, if you have one or more of these symptoms, you should contact your physician immediately. If you do not have a personal or family physician, you should be seen at the nearest urgent-care facility as soon as possible.

Obviously, some of these symptoms also could be caused by less-severe illnesses; however, in the case of heart attack or stroke, it truly is better to be safe than sorry. Immediate treatment of heart attack or stroke can significantly reduce the possibility of severe disability or death. The old saying: "The longer you wait, the worse it will be," is quite accurate in this instance.

In February, which is both Black History Month and American Heart Month, area health organizations will focus on these vital health issues and try to lower their impact in the African-American community. We all know that high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes increase our chances for heart attacks, strokes and other deadly illnesses.

During February 20-24, 2004, more than 17 churches and facilities in Alameda County will provide free blood-pressure screenings, cholesterol and diabetes testing, and health education to assist members of the community in decreasing their risks of heart attacks and strokes. Medical personnel also will be available to answer questions. The screenings are co-sponsored by Alta Bates Summit Health Ministry/Parish Nurse Program, the Sinkler Miller Medical Association, American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Alameda County Medical Center, St. Luke's Society, American Cancer Society, and several other health ministries and educational programs.

Congregations participating include:

Acts Full Gospel Church, Oakland
Brookins AME Church, Oakland

California Hotel, Oakland
Downs Memorial United Methodist Church, Oakland
First AME Church, Oakland
First Baptist Church, Pittsburg
Gethsemane Baptist Church, Berkeley
Havenscourt Community Church, Oakland
Lake Merritt United Methodist Church, Oakland
Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Berkeley
Missionary Church of God and Christ, Berkeley
Parks Chapel AME, Oakland
Resurrection Lutheran Church, Oakland
St. Augustine Episcopal Church, Oakland
St. Columba's Catholic Church, Oakland
St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Oakland
Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Oakland
West Oakland Senior Center, Oakland

For exact times that screenings will be available or for more information, please contact one of the churches listed above or Health Ministry Coordinator Rachel Bryant at 510-869-6763.

About the Author:

June R. Wallace is an African-American community-outreach coordinator for the California Transplant Donor Network. The California Transplant Donor Network saves and improves lives by facilitating organ and tissue donation for transplantation.