



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Department of Health Educates About Signs of a Stroke During National Stroke Awareness Month**

BISMARCK, N.D. – May is recognized as National Stroke Awareness Month and is a great time to remind people about the signs of a stroke and what you can do to avoid having a stroke, according to Susan Mormann, director of the North Dakota Department of Health’s Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program.

A stroke occurs when an artery to the brain either is blocked or bursts. As a result, part of the brain does not get the blood it needs, so it starts to die. If the brain goes without blood for long enough, the person could die or could have long-term side effects, including difficulty with speaking, moving, memory and brain function.

“Many people think stroke only occurs in the elderly, but this is not the case,” said Mormann. “Anyone of any age can experience a stroke and we should all be prepared to recognize the signs and symptoms so we can help ourselves or help others if we notice these things happening. If the person suffering a stroke gets help soon enough, treatment can be given that can save his or her life, or prevent debilitating side effects of a stroke.”

The symptoms of a stroke include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg – especially 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.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

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Use the FAST test for recognizing and responding to stroke symptoms:

**F = Facial Weakness** – Does the person’s face look uneven when asked to smile?

**A = Arm and Leg Weakness** – Does one arm drift down when the person raises both arms and holds them in front of his or her body?

**S = Speech Problems** – Does the person’s speech sound strange when asked to repeat a simple phrase such as, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks?”

**T = Time** – Time is critical. If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately and get help.

“When you recognize stroke symptoms in yourself or in someone you’re with, remember to get help immediately,” Mormann said. “Every second counts and every minute matters. Calling 9-1-1 right away gives people the best chance of surviving the stroke with minimal side effects.”

A drug called tissue plasminogen activator (t-PA) can be given in the first three to four-and-a-half hours to dissolve the blood clot and re-establish blood flow to the brain. It’s important to know when the stroke symptoms appeared so medical personnel know whether it is safe to administer this drug.

“Some stroke risk factors are beyond your control – like being older than 55 or having a family history of stroke,” said Mormann. “But there are many risk factors that you can control. You can make lifestyle changes that will help you be healthier and reduce your risk of stroke.”

Here are some tips for staying healthy and avoiding a stroke:

- Eat a variety of nutritious foods from all the food groups – especially vegetables and fruits.
- Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added fat.
- Select fat-free, 1 percent fat and low-fat dairy products.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium daily.
- Stay physically active. Walk or do other physical activities for at least 30 minutes on most days.
- Know your blood pressure and keep it under control.
- Know and understand your cholesterol number.
- Control your diabetes and work to maintain a healthy blood sugar level.
- Quit smoking. Need help? Call 1.800.QUIT.NOW.

More information about stroke can be found at [www.ndhealth.gov/heartstroke](http://www.ndhealth.gov/heartstroke). For more information, contact Susan Mormann, at 701.328.2367.

– 30 –

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