

Health Disparities in Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke

Findings from the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011*

In recent decades, the United States has made substantial progress in improving our residents' health and reducing disparities, but ongoing economic, racial/ethnic, and other social disparities in health still exist.

Now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011*, which is the first in a series of regular reports that focus on selected topics that are important to CDC's efforts to eliminate disparities.

Released as an *MMWR Supplement*, the report contains 22 topical essays that address disparities in health-care access, exposure to environmental hazards, mortality, morbidity, behavioral risk factors, and social determinants of selected health problems at the national level. The report provides an analysis of the recent trends and ongoing variations in health disparities and inequalities in selected social and health indicators. The data highlight the considerable and persistent gaps between the healthiest people and the least healthy. By documenting these gaps, CDC hopes to spur further action and attention to these issues at the federal, state and local levels.

Key Findings in Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke Disparities

- A comparison of rates by race reveals that black women and men have much higher coronary heart disease (CHD) death rates in the 45–74 age group than women and men of the three other races.
- A higher percentage of black women (37.9%) than white women (19.4%) died before age 75 as a result of CHD, as did black men (61.5%) compared with white men (41.5%).
- The same black-white difference was seen among women and men who died of stroke: a higher percentage of black women (39%) died of stroke before age 75 compared with white women (17.3%) as did black men (60.7%) compared to white men (31.1%).

What Can Be Done

Premature deaths attributable to CHD and stroke among black adults indicate the need for evidence-based interventions to reduce the prevalence of risk factors for cardiovascular disease among black children and adolescents. *The Guide to Community Preventive Services* includes recommended interventions to address the primary risk factors for CHD, stroke, hypertension, and cholesterol, including diabetes, nutrition, physical activity, tobacco, and obesity. Promoting interventions in each of these topic areas will have a ripple effect in improving cardiovascular health and reducing deaths caused by heart disease and stroke.

CDC will accelerate its efforts to eliminate health disparities with a focus on surveillance, analysis, and reporting of disparities and the identification and application of evidence-based strategies to achieve health equity.

CDC and its partners can use the findings in this periodic report to raise awareness and understanding of groups that experience the greatest health disparities. The findings also can help motivate increased efforts to intervene at the state, tribal, and local levels to address health disparities and inequalities.



Recommended Actions to Reduce Health Disparities

1. Increase community awareness of disparities as persistent problems that represent some of the most pressing health challenges in the U.S.
2. Set priorities among disparities to be addressed at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels
3. Articulate valid reasons to expend resources to reduce and ultimately eliminate priority disparities
4. Implement the dual strategy of universal and targeted intervention strategies based on lessons learned from successes in reducing certain disparities (e.g., the virtual elimination of disparities in certain vaccination rates among children)
5. Aim to achieve a faster rate of improvement among vulnerable groups by allocating resources in proportion to need and a commitment to closing gaps in health, longevity, and quality of life



For More Information

The *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011* is available online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr. For more information about this topic, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/HeartDisease/prevention.htm> and <http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/prevention.htm>.