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Heart Month –Know your numbers

Local health officials are encouraging South Heartland residents to “know your blood pressure numbers” because these numbers are an important sign of your heart’s health.

“High blood pressure, or hypertension, is often referred to as a “silent killer” because there are no visible symptoms as it quietly damages blood vessels,” said Michele Bever, executive director of South Heartland District Health Department. “It’s alarming to know that 36% of adults have high blood pressure, which is the leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke,” she said.

The health department is promoting heart health during the month of February. “It would be great if we each would take notice this month of whether we are practicing healthy eating, getting regular physical activity, eliminating smoking and use of tobacco products, and managing our cholesterol and blood pressure numbers,” Bever said. “These are steps we can take to improve our heart’s health.”

One way to keep track of your heart health is to know your blood pressure number and check it regularly. According to Jean Korth, chronic disease program assistant at the health department, a “healthy blood pressure” number is really two numbers. One number is the pressure in your blood vessels when the heart is contracting (squeezing). The other number is the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart is relaxed (between squeezes).

Korth said that new blood pressure guidelines released in November 2017 by the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association lower the healthy blood pressure number. “A healthy blood pressure is now defined as a pressure that falls below 120/80 when you are at rest,” she said.

The health department is encouraging people to check their own blood pressure so they know whether they are at risk for heart disease and can begin to make lifestyle changes. People can have their blood pressure checked when they visit their health care provider’s office and they can use one of the local pharmacy or community locations that have free blood pressure stations.

“You can also check your blood pressure yourself, at home,” said Korth. “If you want to start checking your own blood pressure, it is important that you have proper training – including how to select blood pressure monitoring equipment, how and when to use the equipment, proper positioning technique and how to record and track results,” Korth said.

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