

DH encourages public to enhance health awareness against hypertension

In support of World Hypertension Day, held annually on May 17, the Department of Health (DH) today (May 16) encouraged the public to be aware of and regularly monitor their blood pressure level, and lead a healthy lifestyle to fight against hypertension and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

"According to the World Health Organization, one in four men and one in five women worldwide have hypertension. Globally, it is a major public health challenge because of its high prevalence. The Population Health Survey 2014/15 conducted by the DH revealed that the prevalence of hypertension for persons aged between 15 and 84 was 27.7 per cent locally. Of these, about half were unaware of their own condition but were found to have high blood pressure during the survey," a spokesman for the DH said.

"Hypertension is a prominent risk factor for severe COVID-19 and death. In patients with COVID-19, there are reports showing that those with hypertension were more likely to become seriously ill or die from COVID-19 compared with those without hypertension. Unless with contraindications, individuals with hypertension under stable control are encouraged to receive a COVID-19 vaccination for protection against the disease. Individuals are encouraged to consult their family doctors about a COVID-19 vaccination," the spokesman said.

"Though hypertension is common, there are measures to reduce its risk. The risk of developing high blood pressure can be reduced by maintaining a healthy lifestyle such as lowering salt intake as part of a balanced diet and engaging in regular physical activities. Maintaining an optimal body weight and waist circumference, refraining from smoking and drinking, keeping a healthy state of mind and alleviating stress, as well as getting enough sleep and rest, also help," the spokesman said.

The spokesman added that people should choose food low in salt, sugar and fat, and consume at least two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables a day. Healthy adults should consume less than two grams of sodium (approximately one level teaspoon of salt) per day. They should also engage in at least two and a half hours of physical activities of moderate intensity (such as brisk walking) or one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activities (such as jogging) every week.

Hypertension occurs when the pressure exerted on the walls of arteries is persistently elevated. If hypertension goes untreated or blood pressure is not well controlled, the arteries and vital organs may be damaged, leading to severe complications such as coronary heart disease, stroke, aneurysm, retinal disease and kidney failure, which may result in premature death or a significant drop in the ability to care for oneself.

While very few patients may suffer from headaches, dizziness and shortness of breath, hypertension does not usually give rise to obvious symptoms. As the first presenting symptom can be angina or coma, hypertension is often called the "silent killer".

"It is important to measure blood pressure regularly for early detection of the problem. Adults should have their blood pressure checked at least once every one or two years. If hypertension is suspected, seek a doctor's advice as soon as possible to arrange proper management," the spokesman said.

Blood pressure is presented as two numbers. The first number (systolic pressure) represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart contracts to pump blood, whereas the second or bottom number (diastolic pressure) represents the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats.

An adult is said to have hypertension if one's systolic pressure is persistently at 140 millimetres of mercury (mmHg) or above, or one's diastolic pressure is persistently at 90 mmHg or above. A person should pay more attention to his or her lifestyle and eating habits, and continue with blood pressure monitoring if the systolic pressure is persistently between 130 mmHg and 139 mmHg or diastolic pressure is between 85 mmHg and 89 mmHg, which is considered "high normal blood pressure".

The spokesman reminded members of the public that if hypertension is diagnosed, medication should be taken as directed by a doctor. They should understand what the medication is for, and how and when to take it. Regular medical follow-ups are also needed for appropriate management.

To combat the threat of NCDs, the Government announced "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong" in May 2018, setting out nine local targets to be achieved by 2025, which include halting the rise in the prevalence of high blood pressure. The DH will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach to promote the adoption of a healthy lifestyle by the public to achieve the targets.

Further information about hypertension is available on DH's thematic page at www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/25/35390.html. For information about the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, please visit www.covidvaccine.gov.hk/en/.