

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WEAR RED FEBRUARY 2 TO FIGHT HEART DISEASE,  
THE NO. 1 KILLER OF WOMEN**

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Virginia's public health officials are seeing red these days, and they want to see more, especially on Feb. 2. That's National Wear Red Day, which is linked to the fight to decrease cardiovascular disease (CVD), the No. 1 killer of women – and men – in Virginia and the United States.

“While more women in the U. S. die from cardiovascular disease than from the next six causes combined, only 13 percent of women consider CVD their greatest health risk,” said Deborah Harris, the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) women's health coordinator.

Slightly more than 10,000 women in Virginia died of CVD in 2004, fewer than in past years.

“The good news is that the number of CVD deaths in Virginia and the nation is declining,” said Laura Wimmer, of VDH's Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention project. “The bad news is that the decline is slower for women than for men.” Between 1995 and 2002, the number of CVD deaths among men decreased 6 percent, but the decline was only 1 percent for women, according to American Heart Association (AHA).

To call attention to these facts and help women improve their heart health, VDH is urging Virginians to wear red on Feb. 2. Staff in VDH's district offices and local public health program coordinators plan to wear red as well. “When clients see the staff wearing red, it will provide the opportunity to talk about cardiovascular disease and how to prevent it,” said Harris. School nurses throughout the state also are encouraged to wear red as a way to get students to talk to their mothers about CVD.

Disparities in the treatment women receive may be part of the reason more women die from CVD than men. The AHA says that four out of five physicians don't know that heart disease kills more women than men each year. Women make up 53 percent of total CVD deaths in the U.S. but receive only 33 percent of interventions such as angioplasties and stents, according to the AHA. “We have to change the perception that heart disease is a man's disease,” said Harris.

Other possible reasons for large number of deaths among women may be their lifestyles. A 2005 VDH survey found that about 70 percent of women in Virginia ate less than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, 24 percent did not participate in regular physical activity and nearly 20 percent smoked tobacco.

(more)

“Women can do a lot to reduce their threat of CVD by adopting healthy lifestyles and by knowing their numbers for risk factors such as blood pressure and cholesterol,” said Wimmer. “These are controllable risk factors.”

The 2005 VDH survey also showed that nearly 28 percent of women in Virginia reported having high blood pressure and 35 percent said they had high cholesterol. Normal blood pressure is less than 120 over 80. The desirable level of cholesterol is less than 200. Diabetes is another risk factor for CVD. Blood sugar should be checked every three years after age 40 and be below 100.

Knowing the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and taking quick action if one occurs can also help women live longer. The common signs of a heart attack include pressure in the chest, pain spreading to other areas of the body, shortness of breath and other signs such as a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness. But heart attack symptoms may be different for women and include

- indigestion or gas-like pain
- dizziness, nausea or vomiting
- unexplained weakness or fatigue
- pain between the shoulder blades
- recurring chest discomfort and a sense of impending doom

Women can improve their chances of recovering from a heart attack by calling 911 immediately if they suffer these symptoms.

For more information on National Wear Red Day and how to love your heart visit [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org) or [www.hearttruth.gov](http://www.hearttruth.gov).

Information on the burden of CVD in Virginia is available at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov).

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