

# HEART DISEASE

## PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
**Harford County**  
Health Department

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### SPOTLIGHT: HEART DISEASE IN WOMEN

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both African American and White women, however, is often overshadowed by breast cancer.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it has been thought of as a "man's disease." Unfortunately, the awareness that heart disease is the leading killer in women had decreased in the past decade with 44% awareness in 2019 compared to 65% in 2009.<sup>4</sup> The surveys conducted in 2009, 2012, and 2019 found that non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and Asian women had lower awareness that heart disease was the leading killer in women when compared to White women.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the risk of heart disease in women is crucial, especially given that heart disease can occur at any age. Women-specific life events such as pregnancy can impact the risk for heart disease as well. Pregnancy may bring on high blood pressure, preeclampsia, and gestational diabetes, which can greatly increase a women's risk for developing cardiovascular disease later in life.

### OVERVIEW OF HEART DISEASE<sup>1</sup>

Heart disease refers to several types of heart conditions. Coronary artery disease (CAD) (also referred to as coronary heart disease or ischemic heart disease) is the most common type of heart disease which can lead to a heart attack. CAD is caused by plaque buildup in the arteries that supply blood to the heart. Examples of other conditions related to heart disease include angina, atherosclerosis, atrial fibrillation, cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, pulmonary hypertension, and even mental health disorders. Some risk factors cannot be controlled such as age or family history. However, lifestyle changes and chronic conditions, such as the examples outlined below, can also impact a person's risk for heart disease.

### DATA

The leading cause of death in 2019 for Harford County was heart disease with **476 deaths** and a mortality rate of **163 per 100,000** population in 2017-2019. Healthy lifestyle changes can impact heart disease risk including physical activity, smoking cessation, and consuming a healthy diet. Chronic diseases put you at risk for developing heart disease as well, including obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

#### Adult Health Indicators, Harford and Maryland, 2015-2019<sup>3</sup>

	Harford	Maryland
Exercise in Past 30 Days	74.7%	76.3%
Fruit Intake*	32.7%	35.9%
Vegetable Intake*	16.8%	20.4%
Smoking Prevalence	17.3%	18.5%

#### Adult Chronic Disease Prevalence, Harford and Maryland, 2015-2019<sup>3</sup>

Obesity Prevalence	30.6%	30.7%
Hypertension Prevalence	35.5%	33.5%
High Cholesterol Prevalence	36.1%	33.2%
Diabetes Prevalence (type 2)	11.6%	11.0%

\*percentage reporting eating <1 time per day  
Data provided by the Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

**Sources:**  
 1. CDC. About Heart Disease. <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/about.htm>  
 2. MDH. Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Report 2019. <https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Pages/reports.aspx>  
 3. MDH. 2019 Chronic Disease Burden Tables. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/brfs.aspx>  
 4. American Heart Association. Heart disease awareness decline spotlights urgency to reach younger women and women of color. <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/heart-disease-awareness-decline-spotlights-urgency-to-reach-younger-women-and-women-of-color>  
 5. FDA. Guidance for Industry Voluntary Sodium Reduction Goals. <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-voluntary-sodium-reduction-goals>  
 6. Million Hearts. <https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/>

### HEART HEALTH INITIATIVES

#### Voluntary Sodium Reduction<sup>5</sup>

Eating too much sodium puts a person at risk for developing high blood pressure, which is a leading risk factor for heart disease. The CDC reports that Americans consume about 3,400 mg of sodium each day, and the current recommended limit is 2,300 mg of sodium per day. It is estimated that 70% of American's daily sodium is from processed and restaurant foods. In October of 2021, the FDA provided guidance for voluntary sodium reduction for commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods. This voluntary sodium reduction hopes to decrease the average daily sodium intake from 3,400 mg to 3,000 mg in the next 2.5 years.

#### Million Hearts<sup>6</sup>

Million Hearts is a national initiative led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) with the goal to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes within 5 years (2022-2027). The priority areas include:

1. Building healthy communities by decreasing tobacco use, physical inactivity, and particle pollution exposure.
2. Optimizing care by improving aspirin/anticoagulant use, blood pressure control, cholesterol management, smoking cessation, and cardiac rehabilitation.
3. Focusing on health equity.

