

Millions of Americans have uncontrolled high blood pressure: CDC

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Yet most have regular access to medical care, report notes.

(HealthDay)—One-third of Americans have high blood pressure and only half of them have it under control, dramatically increasing their risk for possibly fatal heart attacks and strokes, a new government report shows.

That translates into 67 million Americans with high [blood pressure](#) and only 36 million people keeping it at healthy levels through medication or other means, the new data suggests.

"[About half] of Americans with high blood pressure don't have it under control and because of that, it's public enemy number two," Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), said during a Tuesday news conference.

Public health enemy number one is tobacco, he added.

The information comes from the Sept. 4 issue of the [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#), a CDC publication. The report also states that direct [health care costs](#) from high blood pressure total almost \$131 billion annually, and the condition contributes to about 1,000 deaths per day.

Although 22 million Americans know they have high blood pressure, they aren't managing it. For 16 million Americans, medication isn't doing the trick, either because they're not getting the right [drug combination](#), they're having trouble paying for a prescription or because another problem is standing in their way, Frieden said.

This is the case despite the fact that most people with high blood pressure have also seen a doctor twice in the past year.

High blood pressure is defined as having systolic blood pressure (top number) greater than or equal to 140 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure (bottom number) greater than or equal to 90 mmHg.

Medication for high blood pressure does work for nearly all patients when taken as prescribed, Frieden added.

Surprisingly, 14 million Americans who have high blood pressure are unaware of it even though multiple readings in a doctor's office have often already revealed the problem, the report said.

While patients can help their own case by taking medications as prescribed, cutting down on sodium and otherwise eating a healthy diet and exercising, doctors and [health care](#) providers, insurers and pharmacists also have a role to play in helping patients get their high blood pressure under control.

Use of electronic health records can help track blood pressure, while 90-day refills and no or low copays can help patients pay for needed medicines.

"This has to be a priority in every doctor's visit," Frieden said.

Prevention of high blood pressure is also a worthy goal, but given that two-thirds of Americans over the age of 65 have [high blood pressure](#), Frieden said, "Realistically, for the foreseeable future, one of the most important things we'll be able to do is improve treatment."

Some health care systems have been able to get their rate of blood pressure control up 80 percent to 85 percent, which has resulted in a dramatic decrease in heart attacks and stroke, Frieden said.

"Treatment can make a really big difference in the short- and medium-term," he added.

More information: The CDC has more on [blood pressure](#).

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