

# Barbershops join fight against high blood pressure in black men

August 1 2014, by Alan Mozes, Healthday Reporter

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Novel partnership detects "silent killer" in more than one-third of those tested, study reports.

(HealthDay)—Across the country, barbershops serve as a time-honored destination for a good cut and conversation.

Now experts want to see whether barbershops might also be the spot to tackle an often overlooked [health](#) concern: high [blood pressure](#) among [black men](#).

In a novel partnership, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, together with the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), enlisted the help of barbershop staff to both discuss and diagnose [high blood pressure](#) after they were given training.

"Initially we tried to do screenings in churches," explained study lead

researcher Vincent Mendy, an epidemiologist in MSDH's Office of Preventive Health. "But only 20 to 30 percent of the people we were reaching were men. So we decided we had to go to where the men are. And barbershops are a good example."

In the initial trial that included 14 barbershops, one-third of the men tested were found to have high blood pressure, and about half were just on the cusp of high blood pressure, known as pre-hypertensive or pre-high blood pressure.

More than a third of those screened ended up being referred to a doctor for follow-up, and Mendy described the project's results as "encouraging." In fact, he said that he and his colleagues plan to expand the program to include a greater number of barbershops.

The researchers outline their efforts in the July 24 issue of the CDC's *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

More than 40 percent of blacks have high blood pressure, which typically manifests at an earlier age and in a more severe form than is usually the case among other ethnic groups, according to the American Heart Association. Blood pressure plays a role in many serious health conditions, such as heart attack and stroke.

Yet many black men remain completely unaware of their blood pressure status. One reason is that high blood pressure often has no symptoms. Another may be a total lack of insurance, too little insurance, or a lack of ready access to [health care](#).

Between 2012 and 2013, the 14 barbershops located in 10 Mississippi cities were recruited as centers for blood pressure screenings, which meant offering staff training on basic cardiovascular risk factors as well as the blood pressure screening process.

In the study time frame, almost 700 black men were screened. Nearly 15 percent had [normal blood pressure](#). But, more than a third were diagnosed with high blood pressure. And, almost half were pre-hypertensive.

Only about four in 10 of the men tested had health insurance. Only about one-third had a personal doctor, according to the study.

"Going forward we plan to better link those men who do have high blood pressure with community health workers in their counties," Mendy added, "to insure that they visit a [health care provider](#) and learn how to navigate the health care system."

Dr. Gregg Fonarow, a professor of cardiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, suggested that the Mississippi project is an example of a very practical way to get information and care to individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

"Despite compelling evidence and guidelines that lowering elevated blood pressures reduces the risk of heart disease and stroke, there are still a large number of [men](#) and women in the United States without adequate awareness, treatment and control of high blood pressure," he noted. "Certain groups remain particularly at risk of having their blood pressure not well controlled, and as a result are having cardiovascular events and strokes that could have been prevented."

But Fonarow noted that accessing these groups in a popular community setting like a barbershop creates "new teachable moments [and] an effective way to improve awareness, treatment and control of blood pressure in individuals that may not be regularly seen in traditional health care settings."

That said, Fonarow stressed that going forward, follow-up will be key, in

order to make sure that individuals diagnosed with high blood pressure actually end up getting the care they need.

**More information:** For more information on blacks and high blood pressure, visit the [American Heart Association](#).

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Citation: Barbershops join fight against high blood pressure in black men (2014, August 1) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-barbershops-high-blood-pressure-black.html>

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