February is American Heart Month

Heart disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States. The American Heart Association estimated that about 71 million Americans have some form of heart disease. The most common form of heart disease is hypertension, or high blood pressure, followed by coronary artery disease. These conditions contribute to the more than 7 million heart attacks that occur every year, and high blood pressure is also a leading contributor to the more than 5 million strokes that occur annually.

Considering the prevalence of cardiovascular disease, and the dangers of it, people are urged to do everything possible to promote heart health. Researchers recognize that heart health is a complicated issue. There are many factors that contribute to heart health, including uncontrollable factors such as heredity and controllable risk factors such as diet and exercise habits.

While we cannot change our family histories, there are many healthy steps everyone can take to reduce their risk of suffering from debilitating heart disease. Healthy lifestyle choices are recommended by experts to help maximize cardiovascular health.

Besides taking active lifestyle steps to improve cardiovascular health, it is also important to know your family medical history, especially of cardiovascular disease and stroke. This information will be important to any physicians who are involved in your health care, and it can be used to help compile a coronary risk profile. The coronary risk profile is a tool developed by the American Heart Association that helps people calculate their long-term risk for suffering a heart attack. It takes into account both uncontrollable and controllable risk factors.

The controllable factors of maintaining heart health include diet and exercise. A balanced diet of complex carbohydrates, healthy fats and lean protein is important for overall heart health. Diets that are high in unhealthy fats, such as saturated fats and trans fats, are linked to elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels, both of which are closely associated with increased risk for heart attack. By contrast, a high-fiber, low-fat diet rich in fruits and vegetables is associated with higher levels of protective cholesterol and reduced risk for heart attack. Adequate intake of vitamins and minerals can also help the heart.

The importance of regular exercise for heart health also cannot be overstated. Exercise has wide-ranging and profound benefits. It has been shown to help lower blood pressure, reduce body fat and lower the risk of diabetes, which reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke. In addition, exercise directly strengthens the heart muscle. New guidelines unveiled by government health agencies recommend that people get between 60 and 90 minutes of exercise on most days of the week.

("Public Health: Educating each generation for a healthier tomorrow.")
What is chlamydia and how common is it?
Chlamydia (kluh-MID-ee-uh) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). STIs are also called STDs, or sexually transmitted diseases. Chlamydia is an STI caused by bacteria called chlamydia trachomatis. Chlamydia is the most commonly reported STI in the United States. Women, especially young women, are hit hardest by chlamydia.

Women often get chlamydia more than once, meaning they are “reinfected.” This can happen if their sex partners were not treated. Reinfections place women at higher risk for serious reproductive health problems, such as infertility.

How do you get chlamydia?
You get chlamydia from vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected person. Chlamydia often has no symptoms. So people who are infected may pass chlamydia to their sex partners without knowing it. The more sex partners you (or your partner) have, the higher your risk of getting this STI.

An infected mother can pass chlamydia to her baby during childbirth. Babies born to infected mothers can get pneumonia (nuh-MOHN-yuh) or infections in their eyes.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia?
Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease. This is because 75 percent of infected women and at least half of infected men have no symptoms.

If symptoms do occur, they most often appear within 1 to 3 weeks of exposure. The infection first attacks the cervix and urethra. Even if the infection spreads to the uterus and fallopian tubes, some women still have no symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may have:

- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Burning when passing urine
- Lower abdominal pain
- Low back pain
- Nausea
- Fever
- Pain during sex
- Bleeding between periods

Men with chlamydia may have:
- Discharge from the penis
- Burning when passing urine

- Burning and itching around the opening of the penis
- Pain and swelling in the testicles

The chlamydia bacteria also can infect your throat if you have oral sex with an infected partner.

Chlamydia is often not diagnosed or treated until problems show up. If you think you may have chlamydia, both you and your sex partner(s) should see a doctor right away — even if you have no symptoms.

Chlamydia can be confused with gonorrhea (gahn-uh-REE-uh), another STI. These STIs have some of the same symptoms and problems if not treated. But they have different treatments.

What is gonorrhea?
Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Gonorrhea is caused by Neisseria gonorrhoeae, a bacterium that can grow and multiply easily in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix (opening to the womb), uterus (womb), and fallopian tubes (egg canals) in women, and in the urethra (urine canal) in women and men. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus.

How common is gonorrhea?
Gonorrhea is a very common infectious disease. CDC estimates that more than 700,000 persons in the U.S. get new gonorrheal infections each year. Only about half of these infections are reported to CDC. In 2006, 358,366 cases of gonorrhea were reported to CDC. In the period from 1975 to 1997, the national gonorrhea rate declined, following the implementation of the national gonorrhea control program in the mid-1970s. After several years of stable gonorrhea rates, however, the national gonorrhea rate increased for the second consecutive year. In 2006, the rate of reported gonorrheal infections was 120.9 per 100,000 persons.

(Cont. on the next page)
How do people get gonorrhea?
Gonorrhea is spread through contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus. Ejaculation does not have to occur for gonorrhea to be transmitted or acquired. Gonorrhea can also be spread from mother to baby during delivery.
People who have had gonorrhea and received treatment may get infected again if they have sexual contact with a person infected with gonorrhea.

Who is at risk for gonorrhea?
Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. In the United States, the highest reported rates of infection are among sexually active teenagers, young adults, and African Americans.

What are the signs and symptoms of gonorrhea?
Some men with gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all. However, some men have signs or symptoms that appear two to five days after infection; symptoms can take as long as 30 days to appear. Symptoms and signs include a burning sensation when urinating, or a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis. Sometimes men with gonorrhea get painful or swollen testicles.
In women, the symptoms of gonorrhea are often mild, but most women who are infected have no symptoms. Even when a woman has symptoms, they can be so non-specific as to be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. The initial symptoms and signs in women include a painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods. Women with gonorrhea are at risk of developing serious complications from the infection, regardless of the presence or severity of symptoms.
Symptoms of rectal infection in both men and women may include discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding, or painful bowel movements. Rectal infection also may cause no symptoms. Infections in the throat may cause a sore throat but usually causes no symptoms.

HPV
One of the newest vaccines being offered to girls and young women, is the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine, called Gardasil. It was approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) in 2006, after being studied in 5 large clinical trials with 21,000 people. The vaccine is important because it prevents four types of HPV, a disease-causing virus that is spread through sexual contact. There are about 40 types of HPV and every year approximately 6.2 million people become infected. In fact, more than half of all sexually active men and women become infected with HPV at some point in their lives.
The good news is that most of these infections have no symptoms and go away on their own. The bad news is that 2 types of the virus cause 70% of all cervical cancer cases. Every year about 10,000 women in the U.S. get cervical cancer and 3,700 women die from it.
The Gardasil vaccine provides excellent protection against these HPV virus types, particularly when it is given BEFORE girls or women become sexually active, which is why the best time to give the vaccine is early, around age 11. Women who are already sexually active can still benefit however, since they may not yet have been exposed to the riskiest types of the virus.
It is anticipated that the HPV vaccine will soon be recommended for boys and young men ages 9-26.
The Gardasil vaccine is available at medical provider offices and at the health department. It is available through the Vaccines for Children Program or covered by insurances for girls under 19.
The Dickinson-Iron District Health Department has recently received Gardasil vaccine for women ages 19-26 who have no insurance coverage for this vaccine through a grant funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).
Anyone interested in receiving the vaccine or to be tested for an STI should call the Health Department to make an appointment.
(Source: Centers for Disease Control)
February is American Heart Month
(Cont. from front page)

Other controllable factors include certain lifestyle factors. Quitting smoking and limiting alcohol intake each can improve the likelihood of heart health. Most people associate smoking with lung cancer, but it is also a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. Excessive alcohol use can be damaging for everyone, and even moderate alcohol use may be a problem for people who have already had a heart attack. Conditions such as daily stress also affect the heart. Stress can contribute to higher blood pressure, which is damaging. Stress can also lead to other emotional problems, such as depression, which in turn, affect the cardiovascular system.

Medication and supplement use should be monitored for heart health. All medications should be taken as prescribed. Supplements are not regulated in the United States and may interact with medications or may not have consistent quality levels. Patients should discuss all medication or supplement use or changes with their physicians. (Source: NBC and iVillage)