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Heart disease devastating to Riverside County residents

One out of four Riverside County residents will die due to heart disease, a rate which is higher than deaths due to cancer, lung disease and stroke, according to a report from county health officials.

The report, *Heart Disease in Riverside County 2005-2010*, shows that more than 80,000 Riverside County adults have been diagnosed with heart disease, heart attacks lead to 4,500 hospitalizations annually, and deaths due to heart disease are particularly high in the Hemet-San Jacinto area. Many can be prevented or delayed.

“Smart dietary choices, including a diet low in saturated fat and high in fiber, can help. Physical activity maintains your heart function. Stopping smoking helps most of all,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, county public health officer.

The report details the rates of heart disease risk factors, including high cholesterol and elevated blood pressure, smoking, fast food consumption, and low consumption of fruits and vegetables. The data also indicate significant differences in heart disease death rates by race and geography.

“Rates of death due to heart disease are almost double in our American Indian and black residents compared to the rest of the county,” said Kevin Meconis, epidemiologist and author of the report. “Even more striking are the geographic disparities.”

The areas in and around Hemet and San Jacinto have a disproportionate share of the county’s heart disease deaths, although health officials don’t know why. Officials suspect social factors like neighborhood environment, education, stress and income all may have an impact.

The *Healthy Riverside County Initiative*, launched earlier this year, has four key priority areas: improving eating habits, increasing daily physical activity, reducing tobacco usage rates, and building healthy environments that support walking, biking, and exercise—all of which will help reduce heart disease rates.

“Heart disease remains our leading cause of death in Riverside County, and it needs to change,” Kaiser said. “Our County’s goal is to improve health and promote livable communities, and there’s no better place to start than with our hearts. The quality of our lives depends on it.”

Heart Disease in Riverside County 2005-2010 is available for download at: www.rivcohealthdata.org