

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive  
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health  
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**LOVE YOUR HEART: PREVENT CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE**  
**February is American Heart Month**

February – the month of valentines and candy hearts – is also American Heart Month, a time for the nation to focus attention on diseases of the heart and circulatory system. These cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease and stroke, kill more than 67,000 New York State residents each year.

In Westchester County this year, particular emphasis is being given to reminding women that they are as much at risk from cardiovascular disease as are men.

“Although men have more heart attacks than women, the death rate from heart attack is higher for women,” said Westchester County Executive Andy Spano. “There has been a common misconception in the past that women are less affected by heart disease than men. That has maybe given women a false sense of security.”

To address this misconception, Westchester County is encouraging local businesses and governments to “Go Red for Women” this February 2<sup>nd</sup>. County employees and others who live or work in Westchester are being encouraged to wear red that day as a reminder, to women in particular, to practice heart healthy lifestyles. The County Office Building in White Plains will also be lit with red lights on that day.

“Among men and women, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death and a major cause of disability in Westchester,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Yet there is much that an individual can do to reduce his or her risk of heart disease or stroke. American Heart Month is a good time to give some thought to heart health.”

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Factors leading to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke include the following:

- Smoking – this doubles a person’s chance of cardiovascular disease. For women, it is the single greatest contributor to increased risk.
- Diabetes seriously increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. More than 80 percent of diabetic patients die from cardiovascular disease.
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol levels also greatly increase the risk of stroke and heart disease.
- Obesity – excess weight puts more strain on the heart, is linked to higher cholesterol and blood pressure levels, and increases the likelihood of type 2 diabetes.

The Westchester County Health Department offers the following suggestions to help residents protect their heart health:

- Know your numbers: keep track of blood pressure and cholesterol levels, as well as blood glucose and body mass measurements.
- Eat well: limit the amount of simple carbohydrates, sodium, saturated fats and trans fat in your diet. Eat plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Increase physical activity: regular moderate to vigorous physical activity can significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. Even modest daily exercise, such as walking, is beneficial over the long term.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

“The critical message we are bringing to women and men is to get physical and know your numbers,” said Dr. Lipsman. “It is hard to control your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels if you don’t know what they are.”

Over the years, County Executive Andy Spano and the Westchester County Health Department have launched many initiatives to encourage heart-healthy lifestyle choices among residents. The County’s Fit Kids program has been especially successful in promoting heart-healthy lifestyle habits among school children.

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In 2004, Mr. Spano unveiled the Be Fit Westchester program to encourage all Westchester County residents to make healthy lifestyle choices and increase their use of County parks. In October of last year, the Health Department launched its Quit Smoking Blog at [www.westchestergov.com/health/TobaccoBlog.htm](http://www.westchestergov.com/health/TobaccoBlog.htm) to give peer-support to residents trying to kick the habit.

This year the County is developing a Chronic Disease Program to expand a focus on the prevention of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes among adults. This initiative will include a pilot project to work with bodega owners to encourage healthy purchasing choices, such as buying low-fat milk rather than whole milk. In April, the County will kick off the Mayors and Supervisors Challenge for a Healthy Community, working with municipal officials and community leaders to promote healthy lifestyle activities in their communities.

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com).