

Minnesota's diabetes rates have nearly doubled in the last 20 years

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The Minnesota Department of Health estimates that about 80,000 adults in Minnesota may have diabetes without knowing it.

Given the seriousness of the disease, the Minnesota Department of Health is encouraging Minnesotans this Diabetes Alert Day, Tuesday, March 26, to ask themselves whether they are at risk for diabetes and to take steps to improve their health.

The percentage of adults in Minnesota who are living with diabetes nearly doubled between 1994 and 2010 and these numbers under-represent the true number of people living with the condition. About 290,000 adults in Minnesota, or 7.3 percent, say they have been told by their health care team they have diabetes.

National data show that only 75 percent of adults with diabetes know that they have the disease. Given Minnesota's population, about 80,000 Minnesotans might have the disease without being aware of it.

"Given the alarming increase of diabetes, we are encouraging Minnesotans to use this day to think about whether they or someone they love might have diabetes or prediabetes and not even know about it," said Minnesota Health Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger. "Diabetes is a very treatable disease and it is important that everyone with diabetes takes steps to get their blood sugar under control and lead a healthier life."

Type 2 diabetes is the most common type of diabetes and often does not have symptoms. Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include being overweight, being older, and for women, having had gestational diabetes during a pregnancy, and having prediabetes. People of color and American Indians also have a higher risk of developing diabetes.

As a first step, Minnesotans can take a simple paper or online test to see if they are at risk for diabetes or prediabetes, at the website <http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/prevention/diabetes-risk-test/>. If you have a score of five or more talk with your health care provider to decide if additional tests are needed. Prediabetes is a warning sign for diabetes and occurs when blood sugar is high, but not high enough to be considered diabetes. People with prediabetes are at increased risk of developing diabetes. National studies suggest about one-third of Americans have prediabetes, which translates to around 1.4 million adults in Minnesota. Most people with prediabetes do not know they have it.

For overweight people with prediabetes, losing even a small amount of weight and increasing physical activity can make a big difference. These steps can reduce diabetes risk, delaying or preventing onset of the disease. MDH also encourages people at risk to get involved with the Diabetes Prevention Program. Individuals can participate in this year-long program that helps people to make lifestyle changes that can reduce diabetes risks. Many organizations in Minnesota offer this program. Listings can be found at: www.icanpreventdiabetes.org.

MDH efforts

The Minnesota Department of Health's Diabetes Program works in partnership with organizations throughout the state to prevent type 2 diabetes and improve care for people with

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diabetes. MDH increases awareness about diabetes and prediabetes, supports health care providers to identify and care for people with diabetes and prediabetes, offers effective programs like the Diabetes Prevention Program, and, through the Statewide Health Improvement Program, creates environments that make it easier for Minnesotans to eat healthfully, be physically active and not use tobacco. Together, these approaches support a healthier Minnesota and reduce the risk for developing diabetes and other chronic diseases.

Diabetes background

Diabetes is a set of diseases with many different causes. All people with diabetes have high levels of blood sugar. Diabetes develops when the body cannot make insulin, a hormone that helps cells to use blood sugar (glucose) for energy, or if the insulin cannot be used properly.

Most people talk about three main types of diabetes: type 1, type 2 and gestational diabetes. Both type 1 and type 2 tend to be life-long conditions, but the causes differ. Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy and goes away after pregnancy for most women. However, women who had gestational diabetes are likely to develop type 2 diabetes after pregnancy.

Over time high levels of blood sugar from diabetes can damage the body and lead to problems like heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, eye problems, dental problems, and many other conditions. For people with diabetes, controlling blood sugar is a powerful way to prevent these health problems.

To learn more about diabetes and prediabetes in Minnesota, visit the MDH website and recently released fact sheets on diabetes and prediabetes at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/diabetes/>.