

Can You Name 5 Stroke Warning Symptoms? A New Survey Shows Most People Can't

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May 8, 2008 -- Do you think sudden [chest pain](#) is a symptom of a stroke? If you answered yes, you're not only wrong, you're not alone.

A telephone survey of more than 71,000 adults in 13 states and Washington, D.C., has revealed that shockingly few people know the warning signs of a stroke. The CDC analyzed data from the 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey and found that only 16.4% of persons surveyed correctly recognized all five stroke warning symptoms, knew to call 911, and could identify an incorrect symptom of stroke.

According to the CDC, the five warning symptoms of a stroke are:

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the arms, legs, or face, especially on one side.**
- **Sudden vision problem in one or both eyes.**
- **Sudden [dizziness](#), loss of balance or coordination, or difficulty walking.**
- **Sudden confusion or trouble speaking.**
- **Sudden severe headache with no known cause.**

Promptly recognizing stroke warning symptoms and seeking immediate emergency care can mean the difference between life and death or disability. Patients whose stroke is caused by an interruption of the blood supply to the brain (blood clot) can be treated with clot-busting drugs, but such medicines should be given within three hours of symptom onset. Other type of strokes may require immediate surgery to prevent serious disability or death.

In general, most respondents (92.6%) knew that sudden numbness, especially on one side of the body, was a stroke warning symptom, but considerably fewer (68.8%) were aware that sudden trouble seeing was a warning symptom.

Other survey findings:

- Only 60.4% knew a severe headache with no known cause was a symptom of stroke.
- 86.5% of respondents correctly identified sudden confusion or trouble speaking as a symptom.

- Slightly fewer (83.4%) knew sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance meant a stroke might be happening.
- Less than half of those surveyed could identify all five stroke warning symptoms.

However, the BRFSS survey showed that correct answers varied by race, ethnicity, gender, education level, and geographic region. In addition to the District of Columbia, states included in the survey were Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Minnesota residents appeared to be the most stroke savvy, topping the list of the most informed across several categories. They were more likely to say they'd call 911 if they thought someone was having a [heart attack](#) or stroke compared to those in other areas. Mississippi residents ranked lowest on that list, coming in at 77.7%.

Whites, women, and persons with a college degree were more likely to know all five stroke warning symptoms and the importance of calling 911 than blacks, Hispanics, men, and those who had not received a high school diploma