



Big NZ Blood Pressure Check set to break records – Saturday 3 October

- **200 communities taking part nationwide**
- **20,000 blood pressure tests in 4 hours targeted**
- **local spokespeople available**

The 2015 Big New Zealand Blood Pressure check is set to break records for the number of people to have their blood pressure tested in one day, in over 200 communities throughout the country on Saturday 3 October. The Stroke Foundation hopes that more than 20,000 New Zealanders will get a free health check on the day.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke and the Big NZ Blood Pressure Check aims to persuade more people to check their blood pressure regularly and take action to reduce it if necessary.

More than 700 volunteers from St John, Wellington Free Ambulance, Rotary and other health organisations will offer the free blood pressure checks to the public, mostly at New World and PAK'nSAVE supermarkets between 10am and 2pm on 3 October.

Stroke Foundation Chief Executive Mark Vivian said: "Every year we alert thousands of New Zealanders to the possibility that they might have high blood pressure. If everyone in the country had healthy blood pressure we could drastically reduce the number of strokes that happen every year – currently around 9,000 people, or one every hour. If people get the message about this simple health check it could make a massive difference to their lives."

In previous years the campaign has tested up to 18,000 people on the day, but with venues topping 200 for the first time it is hoped that the 20,000 barrier will be broken this year. "The more people who know to get this simple check, the more lives we can save," said Mark Vivian. "You can have high blood pressure and know nothing about it – the only way to know is to get it checked."

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Notes to editors:

A full list of all local venues for The Big NZ Blood Pressures Check together with contact details of local spokespeople is attached to this news release. For the public, from Monday 28 September a list of the venues will be posted at www.strokewise.org.nz/bloodpressure (page not live at time of issue of this media release).

A high-res copy of the photograph below can be downloaded from:

<http://www.stroke.org.nz/resources/P9303267.JPG>



A high res copy of the photo below can be downloaded from:

<http://www.stroke.org.nz/resources/PA012452.JPG>



A copy of the campaign logo can be downloaded from:
http://www.stroke.org.nz/resources/BigNZBPCheck_0.jpg

FAQs about the Big NZ Blood Pressure Check

When is the campaign?

The main day of the campaign is Saturday 3 October 2015, but a few sites may run prior to that during the week beginning 28 September.

Who is running the Blood Pressure Awareness Campaign?

The Stroke Foundation of New Zealand (www.stroke.org.nz) runs the campaign, with the support of partners St John, Wellington Free Ambulance, Foodstuffs and Rotary.

What is the aim of the campaign?

The campaign aims to raise public awareness about the relationship between untreated high blood pressure and stroke, and to encourage people to have their blood pressure checked regularly. Free blood pressure checks will be offered as part of the campaign, and information provided about stroke risk factors.

Who is doing the blood pressure testing?

St John volunteers (Wellington Free Ambulance in Wellington) and other health professionals will carry out the blood pressure checks. People found to have a raised blood pressure or with medical questions or concerns will be referred to their GP for follow-up.

Where are the free testing sites?

There will be around 200 sites around the country where people can get their blood pressure checked for free. Most of these sites will be provided by Foodstuffs at their supermarkets (i.e. New World and PAK'n'SAVE), but other sites may include local

council offices, shopping malls, hospital foyers, market places, health centres, and marae health clinics. A list of sites will be available at www.strokewise.org.nz/bloodpressure after 28 September.

What is blood pressure?

As blood travels around our body it puts pressure on our blood vessel walls. Blood pressure measures this. Blood pressure is expressed as two numbers e.g. 120/80. Said as "120 over 80".

The higher number is your Systolic Pressure (e.g. 120). This is the pressure on your blood vessel walls as your heart pumps.

The lower number is your Diastolic Pressure (e.g. 80). This is the pressure on your blood vessel walls as your heart rests between pumps.

Normal blood pressure is around 120/80, but lower is generally better, because the lower your blood pressure, the lower your risk of stroke.

If your blood pressure is consistently over 140/90, you have high blood pressure (hypertension) and will need to see a doctor for advice and treatment.

What is the relationship between high blood pressure and stroke?

High blood pressure is strongly related to stroke. It puts stress on the walls of blood vessels and can cause them to break down, which can lead to a stroke. It can also accelerate common forms of heart disease, or cause blood clots or plaque to break off the artery walls and block a brain artery, causing stroke. High blood pressure is often called a 'silent killer' because people can have high blood pressure without experiencing any symptoms.

How can I lower my blood pressure?

High blood pressure can usually be controlled by a combination of diet, exercise and medication.

You can help lower your blood pressure by:

- Eating less processed food and more fresh fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and lean meat.
- Eating less salt
- Not smoking
- Getting active – sit less and aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

If you drink alcohol, keep your intake low – no more than two standard drinks for women and three for men. Aim for at least two alcohol free days per week.

And remember to have regular blood pressure checks.

