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## September is National Cholesterol Education Month

Medical experts say this is a good time to get your blood cholesterol checked; take steps to lower it if it is high; learn about lipid profiles and about food and lifestyle choices that can help you reach personal cholesterol goals. That's because more than 102 million American adults (20 years and older) have total cholesterol levels at or above 200 mg/dL, which is above healthy levels. More than 35 million of these people have levels of 240 mg/dL or higher, which puts them at high risk for heart disease.

Cholesterol is a fat like substance found in your body and many foods. Your body needs cholesterol to function normally and makes all that you need. Too much cholesterol can build up in your arteries. After a while, these deposits narrow your arteries, putting you at risk for heart disease or stroke.

High cholesterol usually doesn't have a symptom. A simple blood test to check your cholesterol should be checked every 5 years. High cholesterol can be controlled through lifestyle changes or if it is not enough, through medications. It's important to check your cholesterol levels. High cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Young adults who have other risk factors for coronary heart disease: obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, and family history should have their cholesterol checked. A simple blood test called a lipoprotein profile can measure your total cholesterol levels, including LDL (low-density lipoprotein, or bad cholesterol), HDL (high-density lipoprotein, or good cholesterol), and triglycerides.

High cholesterol can develop in early childhood and adolescence, and your risk increases as your weight increases. In the U.S. more than 20% of youth aged 12-19 years have at least one abnormal lipid level. It is important for children over 2 years of age to have their cholesterol checked, if they are overweight/obese, have a family history of high cholesterol, a family history of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, or certain chronic conditions, and childhood cancer survivorship. If you have high cholesterol your doctor may prescribe medications. In addition, you can lower your cholesterol levels through lifestyle changes:

- Low-fat and high-fiber food (eat more fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains)
- For adults, getting at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate or 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity a week. For those 6-17, getting 1 hour or more of physical activity a day.
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Don't smoke or quit if you smoke

For further information please contact Carol Steinke, Public Health Nursing Supervisor with the City of Hartford Health and Human Services Department at (860) 757-4846.