

Chyron: Dr. Darrel Gumm | Interventional Cardiologist, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute

High blood pressure has been redefined. New hypertension guidelines have been released by the American Heart Association (AHA), marking the first change in blood pressure standards in 14 years.

The revised guidelines define high blood pressure, or hypertension, as 130/80 and higher, down from the old definition of 140/90 and higher. This means half the U.S. adult population has high blood pressure under new guidelines, but according to Dr. Darrel Gumm, Interventional Cardiologist for the OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute, it also means earlier intervention for patients, and renewed focus on hypertension prevention.

“Just the fact that these guidelines have come out and have now reemphasized for us as Americans the need to focus on diet, focus on physical activity, focus on these things that we can do to really make us not just healthier, but live longer and better and healthier,” said Dr. Gumm.

The impact of the new guidelines is expected to be greatest among younger people. According to the AHA, The prevalence of high blood pressure is expected to triple among men under age 45, and double among women under 45. Dr. Gumm recommends people start yearly checkups with their physician as early as 18 years old.

“You may even discover that your doctor is going to tell you, ‘You know what? Congratulations. You don’t have high blood pressure, you don’t have high cholesterol, but you’re living a lifestyle that’s going to lead there.’ Let’s prevent the preventable,” he said.

High blood pressure accounts for the second largest number of preventable heart disease and stroke deaths, second only to smoking. It’s known as the “silent killer” because often there are no symptoms, despite its role in significantly increasing the risk for heart disease and stroke.

“It’s true that blood pressure and cholesterol go up as we age, but if we can be proactive and treat that and catch that, we will be doing fantastic things for those patients in terms of preventing heart attacks, strokes and other complications related to these illnesses,” said Dr. Gumm.

The new guidelines were developed by the American Heart Association, American College of Cardiology and nine other health professional organizations. They were written by a panel of 21 scientists and health experts who reviewed more than 900 studies.

Blood pressure categories in the new guidelines are:

- **Normal:** Less than 120/80
- **Elevated:** Top number between 120 to 129 and bottom number less than 80
- **Stage 1 high blood pressure:** 130-139/80-89
- **Stage 2 high blood pressure:** 140/90
- **Hypertensive crisis:** Top number over 180 and/or bottom number over 120