

## Acting Surgeon General Issues 'Call To Action To Prevent DVT And Pulmonary Embolism'

*ScienceDaily (Sep. 17, 2008)* — Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson, M.D., M.P.H., has issued a Call to Action to reduce the number of cases of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism in the United States.

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Galson urged all Americans to learn about and prevent these treatable conditions. Deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism affect an estimated 350,000 to 600,000 Americans each year, and the numbers are expected to increase as the U.S. population ages. Together, deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism contribute to at least 100,000 deaths each year.

Deep vein thrombosis is a blood clot in a deep vein, most commonly in the lower leg or thigh. The clot can block blood flow and cause pain, swelling, and skin discoloration.

In the most serious cases, deep vein thrombosis can lead to a pulmonary embolism — when part of the blood clot breaks loose and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs, where it can block a lung artery, causing damage to the lungs or other organs from lack of oxygen.

"Deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolisms are often 'silent' conditions — they can occur suddenly and without symptoms," Galson said. "But we have made a lot of progress in understanding how these disorders develop and how to prevent, diagnose, and treat them. It's time to put this knowledge into action."

Researchers have found that in most cases, deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism develops in people who have an inherited blood clotting disorder or other risk factor, and who experience a triggering event.

"Being hospitalized or confined to bed rest, having major surgery, suffering a trauma, or traveling for several hours can increase a person's risk of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism," Galson said. "We want to increase the awareness and knowledge of these potentially deadly conditions and encourage patients and health care providers to take the steps to prevent them."

The Call to Action urges a coordinated, multifaceted plan to reduce the numbers of cases of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism nationwide. The plan emphasizes the need for:

- Increased awareness about deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism.
- Evidence-based practices for deep vein thrombosis.
- More research on the causes, prevention, and treatment of deep vein thrombosis.

The Call to Action resulted from a Surgeon General's Workshop on Deep Vein Thrombosis which was convened in May 2006. The workshop was co-sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health.

"Deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism are major public health problems, and NHLBI is committed to continuing to support important basic and clinical research to advance our understanding of these disabling and potentially fatal conditions," NHLBI Director Elizabeth G. Nabel, M.D., noted. "Research is shedding light on genetic factors and the role of triggering events, behaviors, and conditions that increase the risk of developing dangerous blood clots. It is imperative that clinicians and public health experts work together to translate this scientific evidence to save lives."

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) contributed to the Call to Action with the release of two new guides — one for patients and another for health care providers — on how to prevent dangerous blood clots. "Fighting deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism is a team effort that involves health care providers and patients," said AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism 2008, is available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/index.html>.