



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
MENTAL HYGIENE**

Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
Commissioner

nyc.gov/health

**Friday, March 4, 2005
(212) 788-5290; (212) 764-7667**

**BLACK, HISPANIC, AND LOW-INCOME WOMEN IN NEW YORK CITY
AT INCREASED RISK FOR PREMATURE ILLNESS AND DEATH**

“Women At Risk: The Health of Women in New York City” Report Released

NEW YORK CITY – March 4, 2005 – New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Commissioner Dr. Thomas R. Frieden today presented findings from **“Women at Risk: The Health of Women in New York City,”** a new report that outlines health behaviors, health care access, and health outcomes among different economic and racial/ethnic groups of women in New York City. The report, which is structured around the ten key areas from *Take Care New York*, the City’s health policy, is available online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/data/data-womenatrisk-2005.pdf>. It was released at a breakfast event at KPMG in Manhattan co-sponsored by DOHMH, The Commonwealth Fund, the Fund for Public Health in New York, and the NYC Commission on Women’s Issues.

Overview of the “Women at Risk” Report

- The health of women in New York City has greatly improved over the past decade, but some groups of women – particularly black, Hispanic, and low-income women - still experience poor health.
- Many women in New York City do not receive appropriate levels of preventive care, including regular cancer screenings and immunizations.
- Women lag behind men in heart disease prevention efforts, such as exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy weight.

Among the report’s specific findings are:

- Women in New York City’s poorest neighborhoods have a life expectancy 5 years shorter than those who in the highest income neighborhoods. Black women have a life expectancy almost 5 years shorter than white women.
- Data suggest that women are more obese than men. An estimated 30% of black women, 26% of Hispanic women, 15% of white women, and 10% of Asian women are obese.
- Hispanic women and women with low incomes are less likely than most other women to have health care coverage.
- Black women are more than twice as likely as white women to die from pregnancy-related complications.
- Among women, 27% of years of potential life lost are due to cancer, while cancer is responsible for only 17% of the years of potential life lost among men.
- Nearly one-quarter of women age 40 and older have not received a mammogram in the past two years; fewer than half of women age 50 and over have ever had a colon cancer screening; and 1 in 5 women have not had a Pap test in the past three years. Asian women are least likely to receive colon cancer screenings and Pap tests.
- The rate of new AIDS diagnoses is 11 times higher among black women than white women and the rate of AIDS deaths is 7 times higher.

Dr. Frieden was joined at the event by **Dr. Harold Freeman**, Medical Director of the Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Care and Prevention; cardiologist **Dr. Nieca Goldberg**; **Dr. Marjorie Hill**, Director of the Women's Institute at Gay Men's Health Crisis; **Dr. Karen Davis**, President of the Commonwealth Fund; and radio personality **Valerie Smaldone**, of 106.7 Lite-FM. The event focused on three areas of women's health: cancer, HIV/AIDS, and heart health.

DOHMH Commissioner Frieden said, "Women's health has improved greatly in the past decade, but we can do even better. The findings of the "Women at Risk" report identify critical issues, intervention strategies, and particularly vulnerable groups of women."

"One of the greatest risks for women in New York City is not to have access to cancer screening, timely diagnosis and treatment," said **Dr. Harold Freeman** of the Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Care and Prevention.

Cardiologist **Dr. Nieca Goldberg** said, "This conference is vital to the health of women in New York City, particularly when it comes to their hearts. Now is the time to focus on the heart health of women at the greatest risk because they are the heart of their families and heart of our city."

Dr. Marjorie Hill of Gay Men's Health Crisis said, "Gender specific HIV prevention, care and treatment must take into account the myriad of psychosocial, economic, human rights and cultural nuances that impact the lives of women, especially women of color. No woman is an island, but many HIV positive women feel isolated and alone."

"These findings highlight the critical importance of health care coverage in ensuring access to medical care; too many women are needlessly at risk for preventable illness because they are uninsured," said Commonwealth Fund President **Karen Davis**. "Improving coverage for eligible low-income women in Medicaid and Family Health Plus is a particularly effective way to improve the health of millions of New Yorkers."

"The NYC Commission on Women's Issues continues to focus on the health of women throughout the city for the very reasons this report cites," said Chair of the Commission, **Anne Sutherland Fuchs**. "We are committed to keeping the health of women in New York a top priority through programs such as Step Out New York, which encourages women to become more physically active."

Data Sources

The report, which was funded by the Commonwealth Fund, is based on a comprehensive review of health data on New York City women aged 18 and older, as well as additional data on female adolescents, from a variety of City, State, and national sources.

"Women at Risk: The Health of Women in New York City" is being distributed to community organizations, elected officials, universities, health care providers, and others throughout the City. The report is online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/data/data-womenatrisk-2005.pdf>, or through The Commonwealth Fund website at: <http://www.cmf.org>. To request copies, send an email to womenhealth@health.nyc.gov.

###

#019

CONTACT: (212) 788-5290; (212) 764-7667 (After Hours)
Sandra Mullin (smullin@health.nyc.gov)
Monique Duwell (mduwell@health.nyc.gov)