

# Hypertension

## Why It Is Important

High blood pressure, which is also known as hypertension, is dangerous because it forces the heart to work extra hard to pump blood out to the rest of the body and contributes to the development of the hardening of the arteries and heart failure. While the exact causes of hypertension are unknown, the following are believed to be contributing factors: smoking; being overweight; lack of physical activity; too much salt in the diet; too much alcohol consumption (no more than one to two drinks per day); stress; older age; genetics; family history of high blood pressure; chronic kidney disease; and adrenal and thyroid disorders.<sup>51</sup>

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a blood pressure reading of 140/90 mmHg or higher.<sup>52</sup> Nearly 1 in 3 American adults has high blood pressure, and once it develops, it usually lasts a lifetime.<sup>53</sup> High blood pressure is referred to as the silent killer because it typically does not have symptoms. Some people may not find out they have it until they have trouble with their heart, brain, or kidneys. When high blood pressure is not found and treated, it can cause:

- The heart to get larger, which may lead to heart failure.
- Small bulges (aneurysms) to form in blood vessels. Common locations are the main artery from the heart (aorta); arteries in the brain, legs, and intestines; and the artery leading to the spleen.
- Blood vessels in the kidney to narrow, which may cause kidney failure.
- Arteries throughout the body to “harden” faster, especially those in the heart, brain, kidneys, and legs. This can cause a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, or amputation of part of the leg.
- Blood vessels in the eyes to burst or bleed, which may cause vision changes and can result in blindness.<sup>54</sup>

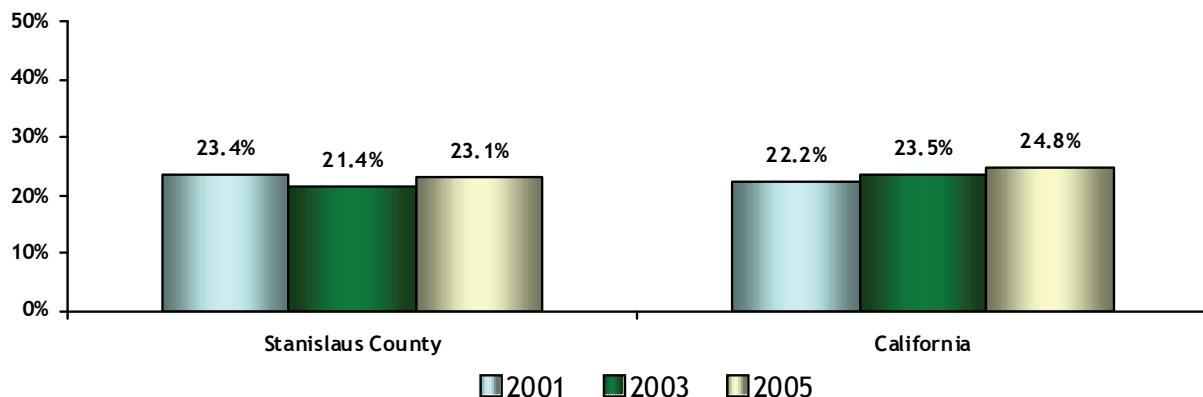
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<sup>51</sup> WebMD, reviewed by doctors at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center. *Hypertension: Blood Pressure Basics*. 2006. <<http://www.webmd.com/hypertension-high-blood-pressure/guide/blood-pressure-basics>>.

<sup>52</sup> National Heart Lung and Blood Institute Diseases and Conditions Index, High Blood Pressure, May 1, 2007, [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP\\_WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP_WhatIs.html).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

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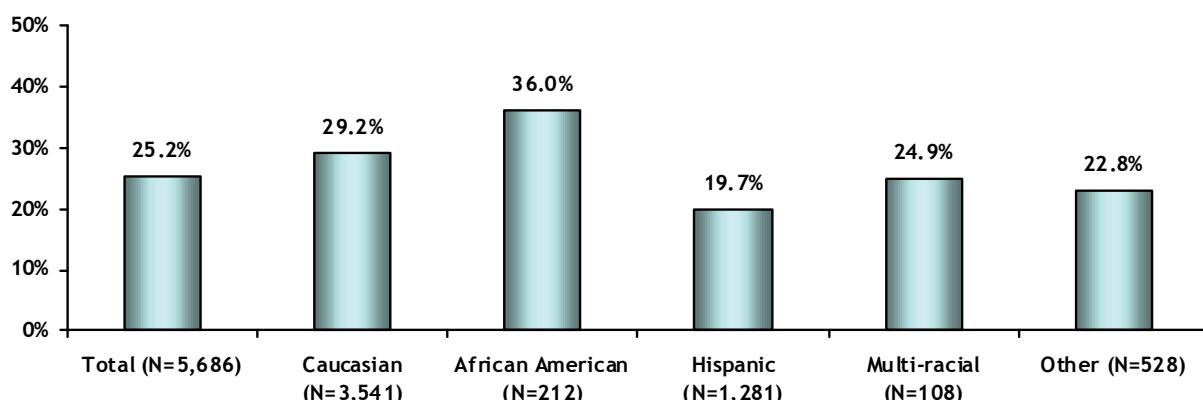
**Figure 116:** Adults Who Have Been Diagnosed with High Blood Pressure

Source: 2001, 2003, and 2005 California Health Interview Survey.

Stanislaus County 2001 N: 314,000; 2003 N: 335,000; 2005 N: 352,000.

California 2001 N: 24,561,000; 2003 N: 25,597,000; 2005 N: 26,388,000.

New data not available

**Figure 117:** Adults Who Have Been Told They Have High Blood Pressure, by Ethnicity, California, 2007

Source: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Prevalence data, 2008.

Note: total N does not equal the summation of the N's by ethnicity.

## Data Summary

The percent of Stanislaus County adults diagnosed with high blood pressure remained relatively constant between 2001 and 2005 (21-23%). Over that same time period, the percent of California adults diagnosed with high blood pressure increased from 22% to 25%. According to the BRFSS in 2007, the percent of adults in California with high blood pressure was 25%. In 2007, African Americans had the highest percentage of individuals who had high blood pressure (36%), followed by Caucasians (29%). Hispanics had the lowest percentage of individuals with high blood pressure (20%).