

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent DVT and PE

Key Report Findings

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) refers to the formation of one or more blood clots (a blood clot is also known as a "thrombus") in one of the body's large veins, most commonly in the lower limbs (e.g., lower leg or calf).

Approximately half of all DVT episodes produce few, if any, symptoms. For some patients, DVT is an "acute" episode (that is, the symptoms go away once the disease is successfully treated), but roughly 30% of patients suffer additional symptoms, including leg pain and swelling, recurrent skin breakdown, and painful ulcers. Individuals experiencing their first DVT remain at an increased risk of subsequent episodes throughout the remainder of their lives.

The most serious complication that can arise from DVT is a pulmonary embolism (PE) which occurs in over one-third of DVT patients.

- **350,000 to 600,000 Americans each year suffer from DVT and PE**, and that at least **100,000 deaths** may be directly or indirectly related to these diseases.
- Too few health care professionals are aware of the evidenced-based practices for identifying high-risk patients and providing preventative, diagnostic, or therapeutic services.
- Perhaps as many as **50% of the cases of DVT are "silent."** Very often the first symptom of a DVT is a fatal PE!
- More than half of the cases of DVT that actually occur are never diagnosed.
- Epidemiological studies suggest that roughly one in five individuals die almost immediately from PE, while 40% die within 3 months.
- At a minimum, those who have had DVT or PE will remain at increased risk for another episode. Roughly 30% of those who have had a DVT in a given year will suffer from a recurrent episode sometime in the next 10 years, with the risk being the greatest in the first 2 years.
- What factors raise the risk for DVT and PE?
 - Have experienced recent trauma
 - Have undergone major surgery
 - Are obese
 - Have cancer
 - Are pregnant
 - Use hormone therapy
 - Smoke
- Most hospitalized patients have at least one risk factor, including immobility, cancer, infection, and/or surgery. **In fact, in the absence of appropriate preventative treatment, 10% to 40% of medical and general surgery patients, and 40% to 60% of patients requiring major orthopedic surgery develop thrombosis.**

