



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, SEPTEMBER 25, 2003

Get Checked Out Head To Toe For Potentially Deadly Cardiovascular Disease Through Free “Legs For Life” Screening Program

FAIRFAX, Va., Aug. 25 – Cardiovascular health involves more than just a fit heart. A nationwide screening campaign, “Legs For Life,” aims to alert people about potentially deadly cardiovascular conditions from head to toe, from stroke to aneurysms, vein and artery

Legs For Life At-A-Glance

- Over the past 5 years, the Legs For Life program has screened nearly 250,000 Americans for potentially deadly blood clots in their legs, called peripheral vascular disease (PVD).
- PVD affects 10 million Americans, and can be a sign of system-wide cardiovascular disease. One in 4 people screened through Legs For Life have been found to be at risk for PVD.
- Legs For Life continues to expand to address overall cardiovascular health: in addition to PVD, select sites will be screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA), venous disease and stroke.
- For information about screening site locations, visit www.legsforlife.org.

problems to peripheral vascular disease (PVD), the equivalent of a heart attack in the legs.

During the week of Sept. 7-13, tens of thousands of Americans will be screened for vascular conditions at more than 300 U.S. hospitals and clinics across the country for as part of the free *Legs For Life*® national screening program. All sites will screen for PVD and provide educational information on other vascular conditions. Many sites also will screen for abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA), venous disease and blockages that can lead to a stroke. Legs For Life, now in its sixth year, is the longest running and most successful screening program of its kind.

“About a quarter of a million people have been screened since we began this program and we consistently find that 1 out of every 4 are at a significant risk for PVD and other serious vascular conditions and should talk to their doctors about

treatment,” said Harvey Wiener, D.O., the 2003 national chairman of the Legs For Life Program. “We began the program by screening for just PVD, but have expanded it at most

sites to screen for related cardiovascular conditions that are often present when PVD is a concern.”

PVD, or clogged leg arteries, is potentially fatal, and affects more than 10 million Americans, most older than 50. PVD often is an indicator that other cardiovascular problems are present. Symptoms of PVD can include pain or swelling in the legs, difficulty walking, numbness and skin discoloration, but about half of those with PVD have no symptoms. Diabetics, smokers and people with high blood pressure or high cholesterol are at increased risk for PVD. Simple tests such as comparative blood pressure readings and ultrasound are used during the screening to determine if the person is at risk for PVD or one of the other conditions.

Legs For Life screenings are organized by multidisciplinary teams of vascular specialists (interventional radiologists, cardiologists and vascular surgeons), all of whom donate their time.

Since the program was piloted in 10 cities in 1998, it has grown to hundreds of sites in most every state in the U.S. In five years, 249,270 people have been screened and more than 23,000 health care professionals have been involved, including doctors, nurses and technicians. Consistently, 1 in 4 people screened were determined to be at either moderate or high risk for PVD. Between 22 percent and 25 percent of people were determined to be at risk for AAA, since screening for that condition was added in 2001. This is the first year screenings will be performed for venous disease and risk factors for stroke.

People who come to a Legs For Life screening fill out a lifestyle questionnaire to help determine their risk for PVD, and undergo a 10-minute exam that involves taking blood pressure in the arm and ankle. Sites screening for other conditions may use additional tests. Many of the risks for AAA, stroke and venous disease are the same as those for PVD.

- **Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA or Triple A)** - The 17th leading cause of death in the U.S., AAA is a weakened area in the aorta, the main vessel that supplies blood from the heart to the rest of the body. Like a balloon, the weakened area can bulge and even burst, resulting in death more than 80 percent of the time. Some sites screening for AAA will also use ultrasound to screen people with risk factors.
- **Venous Disease** - More than 8 million Americans suffer from venous disease, which is caused by weakened valves in the legs that allow blood to flow backward and pool.

Venous diseases include varicose veins (swollen, rope-like veins, most often in the legs), vasculitis or phlebitis (inflammation of a blood vessel), deep vein thrombosis (DVT – blood clots that form in leg veins and can lead to death by breaking off and clogging an artery to a lung) and venous stasis (permanent damage of the vein valves). In addition to having the person fill out a questionnaire, Legs For Life sites screening for venous disease also may use additional noninvasive tests, including ultrasound.

- **Stroke** - About 700,000 Americans have strokes every year, and stroke is the third leading cause of death and a major cause of disability. It is caused when a blood vessel to the brain bursts, or is blocked by a clot. This prevents blood and oxygen from being delivered to the brain and eventually causes that part of the brain to die. Select Legs For Life sites will use a questionnaire and a variety of noninvasive tests, including blood pressure measurements, a cholesterol check and tests of the carotid arteries in the neck, which also can become clogged.

Those determined to be at moderate or high risk for any of these cardiovascular diseases will be advised by Legs For Life screening physicians to see their primary care physicians for follow up and treatment information.

For more information beginning in late July, consumers can visit the Legs For Life Web site at www.legsforlife.org to locate screening sites and request free educational brochures.

Legs For Life was founded by the Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) in 1997, piloted in 1998 and launched nationally in 1999. Collaborating organizations include the American Diabetes Association, the American Radiological Nurses Association, the Council on Cardiovascular Radiology and Intervention of the American Heart Association and the Society for Vascular Nursing. Program funding is administered by the Cardiovascular and Interventional Radiology Research and Education Foundation (CIRREF).

Legs For Life initially was launched with unrestricted educational grants from Boston Scientific Corporation and Abbott Laboratories. A three-year funding cycle (2000-2002) was generously supported by Boston Scientific Corporation, Guidant Foundation, Otsuka

America Pharmaceutical, Inc., Pharmacia Corporation, Abbott Laboratories, Amersham Health, Angiodynamics, Inc. and Genentech.

Guidant Foundation has taken the lead in funding the next three-year cycle (2003-2005) by generously providing its second \$1 million grant for Legs For Life.

#