

## *Knowing Family Health History Can Save Lives*

Family health history has long been recognized as a risk factor for many health problems including heart disease, stroke, asthma, cancer, and diabetes. When close family members have the same health problem or develop a problem at a younger age than expected, this can increase other family members' risk of developing the problem. This is because families share their genetics, lifestyles, and environment. But the good news is, by learning about your family health history, you can make healthy choices to lower your risk.

In November 2004, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona issued a Family Health History Initiative, in which he encouraged all Americans to learn about their family health history. Dr. Carmona stated, "Knowing your family health history can save your life. The earlier you know which health conditions run in your family, the easier it is to develop prevention plans with your doctor."

The Utah Department of Health has teamed together with genealogists, genetic counselors, and other health professionals to develop a free toolkit to help families learn about their family health history. The toolkit includes fun ideas, conversation starters, and other resources to help families take the steps to collect a family health history. These include:

- Talking about their family health history during family gatherings.
- Writing down what they learn about their family health history.
- Sharing their family health history with their health care provider and other family members who can benefit from knowing this information.

When collecting a family health history, ask about health problems of close family members such as your children, parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. Things that are important to collect about your family members include:

- Age when the health problem started or was diagnosed
- Age and cause of death for family members who have died
- Lifestyle habits (smoker/nonsmoker, diet, weight, exercise habits)
- Ethnic background

Sharing your family health history with your health care provider is also important. Your health care provider can help you understand your risk for developing a health problem and make recommendations about lifestyle choices and screening tests to lower your risk. Families at a high risk for some health problems may also need to talk with a genetic counselor or other specialist to understand how they can lower their risk.

To order a free Family Health History Toolkit, visit [www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics) or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542. For additional questions contact the Utah Department of Health, Chronic Disease Genomics Program at [genomics@utah.gov](mailto:genomics@utah.gov) or call 801-538-9416.