

What is hypertension?

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is a condition in which the blood force against the body's blood vessels is consistently too high. Think of it like too much pressure in a garden hose. Over time, that pressure can cause damage.

Blood pressure is measured using two numbers:

— Systolic pressure (top number): Pressure when the heart squeezes blood to the rest of the body

— Diastolic pressure (bottom number): Pressure when the heart relaxes between beats

Normal blood pressure is usually anywhere from 100/60 to 130/80 mmHg. If your numbers are 130/80 or higher, the majority of the time, you may have high blood pressure.

Q: Why is hypertension important?

A: Hypertension often has no obvious signs or symptoms; it can lead to serious health issues if left unmanaged. That is why it is often called the “silent killer.” It can affect multiple organs of the body and is a leading risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Catching it early through regular check-ups is important. Even if you feel fine, unmanaged high blood pressure can cause damage over time.



Rohit Masih, MD
UNC Health Southeastern

Q: What are the dangers of high blood pressure?

A: The dangers of high blood pressure can be a lot more than one thinks. If not controlled, high blood pressure can lead to heart disease. This includes heart attacks, increased thickness of the heart muscle, and/or congestive heart failure. Additionally, it also raises the risk of having a stroke or kidney damage which can ultimately lead to the need for dialysis.

Q: How can you track your blood pressure?

A: You can use a home blood pressure monitor which is available at most drug stores. Alternatively, many pharmacies offer free or low-cost blood pressure checks. Importantly, blood pressure can vary and should be taken as follows:

Blood pressure machine should be at the heart level, while seated in a chair and the back supported.

One should be relaxed.

After placing the blood pressure cuff, wait for five mins and then press the button on the blood pressure machine.

Q: Can I treat or lower it?

Yes, through lifestyle changes and medication.

Some examples of lifestyle changes include reducing sodium intake; ideally under 2000 mg/day; keeping dietary fat and cholesterol intake at a minimum; exercising regularly for at least 150 minutes of moderate level activity every week; keeping stress at a minimum using techniques such as yoga and meditation; and limiting alcohol intake and quitting smoking.

Sometimes, lifestyle changes are not enough. Your provider may prescribe medicine to help manage your blood pressure. It is important to take the medication as prescribed, even on days that you feel well, to prevent long-term complications.

Final Thoughts

Hypertension is common, but it does not have to control your life. With regular monitoring, lifestyle adjustments, and treatment when needed, you can reduce your risk of serious complications and lead a healthy life. Do not wait for symptoms; check your blood pressure regularly.

Rohit Masih, M.D., is a cardiology fellow at UNC Health Southeastern. To schedule an appointment, call the referral line at 984-974-CARE. To learn more, visit unchealthse.org. To submit questions for consideration for a Frequently Asked Questions article, email unchsoutheasterninfo@unchealth.unc.edu.



Farm by the road in eastern North Carolina.

Molly Osborne | EdNC via NC Health News

Telehealth initiative launches in 4 rural NC school districts

Caroline Parker
EdNC via NC Health News

The North Carolina Community Schools Coalition (the Coalition) gathered representatives from four northeastern NC districts on Oct. 15 to kick off a new telehealth service for students and staff.

Seven schools — including Windsor Elementary, Bertie Middle School, Gaston STEM Leadership Academy, Northampton County High School, Mattamuskeet School, Washington County High School, and Washington County Elementary School — are participating in this pilot.

Melissa McDonald is director of services for the Coalition and said the organization started to think about health interventions in school back in May 2024. According to McDonald, leadership in each district identified the access to health care as an issue for their students and

staff.

“Whether it was the doctor’s office is just really far away, or getting parents to be able to get to the school, then have to take their kid to the doctor, and get back — those are really big challenges that they (school districts) were seeing,” said McDonald.

According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, all four counties — Bertie, Hyde, Northampton, and Washington — are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) and have HPSA scores above 17 (on a scale of 0-25), the highest range available on this map. This is a composite score that indicates a shortage of primary care providers.

A possible solution? Bringing access to health care and providers to the students via telehealth appointments at school.

The City of Medicine Volunteer Medi-

cal Corps (VMC) will manage the service. The provider is no stranger to working with schools.

The VMC first began working with Durham Public Schools in July of 2020. Dr. Cathi Sander started the organization as a way to increase access to preventative health care for school aged children, in collaboration with community and local nonprofits.

The VMC will ensure that different providers are available for telehealth screenings for four of the five school days. Students must have signed consent forms before using the service and the Community School Coordinators are currently promoting the service and educating parents. These Community School Coordinators are full-time employees of the school who work in tandem with the organization and help facilitate programs and partnerships like this one.

Parents will still be notified when a student needs an appointment, but ideally they won’t have to leave their jobs or homes to come get a sick kid.

Access to telehealth could keep parents from missing work, reduce transportation issues if providers are far away, decrease student absenteeism, and streamline the system for seeing a physician for more common illnesses that are easily treated.

McDonald said metrics of success will be measured by how many students and educators use the service. An improved school attendance record would also be an indicator that the program is successful.

The overall hope, McDonald said, is to help these communities have increased access to health care by building the infrastructure so that health care can be delivered through schools.

Meet pain management provider Crystal Berumen

Amanda Crabtree
For The Robesonian

LUMBERTON — Certified Family Nurse Practitioner Crystal Berumen has joined Interventional Pain Specialist Michael Abdou, MD, and the staff of UNC Health Pain Management Specialists at Southeastern Health Park. Conditions treated at the clinic include back and neck pain; diabetic neuropathy; peripheral neuropathy and disease-related pain.

Berumen earned an associate degree in nursing from Robeson Community College and a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Grand Canyon University based in Phoenix, Arizona. She also earned a master’s degree in nursing with a family nurse practitioner emphasis from South University in Savannah, Georgia.

“Previously a registered nurse with UNC Health

Southeastern for nine years, I chose to become an advanced practice provider to have a greater impact on patient care by directly improving patient outcomes,” said Berumen. “Currently specializing in interventional pain management allows me to help patients regain mobility and functionality which improves their emotional well-being.”

To learn more or to



Berumen

schedule an appointment with Berumen at UNC Health Pain Management at Southeastern Health Park, located at 4901 Dawn Drive, Suite 2400, Lumberton, call 910-671-9298 or visit <https://www.unchealth.org/care-services/locations/unchealth-pain-management-at-southeastern-health-park-lumberton>.

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