

## BP: the silent killer on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa

Globally, every day 28,000 people die from the consequences of hypertension (elevated blood pressure - BP) which is the equivalent of 70 jumbo jets crashing and killing everyone on board.



Source: ©SIMONSAYS Communications. The Because I Say So campaign reminds South Africans to go to their local pharmacy, clinic or doctor to get tested

This makes it the biggest single contributor to deaths globally according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

### On the rise in Africa

Globally adults with raised BP grew from 594 million to 1.13 billion between 1975 and 2015.

Of great concern is that over these four decades research has shown that the highest worldwide BP levels shifted from high-income countries to low-income, developing countries, particularly in Africa.

By 2015, sub-Saharan Africa joined central and Eastern Europe and south Asia as the regions with the highest global BP levels.

### ***Because I Say So***

The good news is that regular BP checks can save lives and *Because I Say So*, a public health campaign, is calling on South Africans to go and get their BP tested.

Orchestrated for the third year in a row by the International Society of Hypertension (ISH), the Southern African Hypertension Society (SAHS) and Servier; this worldwide campaign aims to refocus public attention, by encouraging young adults to motivate their parents and loved ones to get their BP checked.

The campaign is being shared on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

## **More critical than ever**

This year the *Because I Say So* campaign message is even more crucial as hypertension has been identified as one of the main factors in the occurrence of more severe symptoms in patients with Covid-19.

Added to this, fewer patients have been able to be diagnosed due to greater difficulties in accessing their health care practitioners since the outbreak began.

## **The silent killer**

This is alarming when you consider that 44 - 46% of adults over the age of 15 in South Africa have high BP - but only 50% know they are affected.

Prof Brian Rayner, nephrologist and past director of the Hypertension Institute at the University of Cape Town says, "Elevated BP is subject to the rule of halves.

"50% of the population is unaware of their condition, 50% of those who are aware do not take treatment, and 50% of those who take treatment are not controlled, leaving only 12.5 % of the total population who are controlled."

The reason so many are unaware that they have elevated BP levels is there are no symptoms and you don't feel ill until you have a cardiac event like a heart attack.

Dr Martin Mpe a Gauteng-based cardiologist and president of the SAHS explains that high BP is acknowledged as the 'silent killer' because it's just that.

"Despite there being no indications or symptoms of ill health, this invisible illness can potentially, if left unchecked, lead to serious heart disease, stroke and even death.

"Other complications can include heart failure, peripheral vascular disease, renal damage, retinal hemorrhage, and visual impairment," he says.

"With relatively few people making the connection between raised BP and the devastating consequences of the illness - awareness levels need urgent attention to curb the exponential growth of the disease in South Africa," he adds.

## **Reminder to get tested**

A BP test is the only way to find out if BP levels are elevated – a non-invasive and quick measure that will immediately determine if levels are unacceptably high.

The *Because I Say So* campaign reminds South Africans to go to their local pharmacy, clinic or doctor to get tested

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