

Wednesday, June 24, 2009
6:02 PM



**City of Duluth
Duluth Fire Department
Press Release**

For Immediate Release:

**Erik Simonson
Assistant Chief
730-4391**

The Duluth Fire Department is proud to partner with St. Luke's Hospital and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation to offer a high blood pressure awareness program to its firefighters this week.

This program could not have come at a more appropriate time; "Firefighters across the nation set aside an entire week every June, dedicated to firefighter safety, health and survival", says Duluth Fire Chief John Strongitharm. "This year firefighters are focusing on safe emergency driving practices, situational awareness and firefighter heart disease and cancer education".

The STOP, DROP and CONTROL high blood pressure program was created as a collaborative effort between the International Association of Fire Fighters and Novartis. It is a comprehensive campaign to treat and control high blood pressure in firefighters, their families, and members of the community.

45% of on-duty firefighter deaths are caused by heart disease each year – and high blood pressure is one of the controlling factors in cardiovascular deaths among firefighters. It is estimated that 74% of firefighters with high blood pressure do not have their blood pressure adequately controlled.

With the gracious support of St. Luke's Hospital staff, Duluth's firefighters are participating in a program this week that is designed to:

- Educate firefighters about the importance of effectively managing high blood pressure,
- Provide firefighters diagnosed with hypertension with information about prevention and treatment,
- Motivate firefighters to have their blood pressure measured regularly.

Screeners will be following up in the coming months to begin gathering data to evaluate the program effectiveness. Even though Duluth's firefighters spend a significant amount of their time helping others, it is too easy to become complacent about their own medical needs. This program

is designed in such a way that medical professionals from St. Luke's Hospital are actually on hand to measure their blood pressures, and provide important information.

Duluth firefighters hope to use this program in the near future to bring education, awareness and screenings to the community. Thursday will be the final day of firefighter initial screenings, held at Duluth Fire Department Headquarters.