

# Certified stroke centers more likely to give clot-busting drugs

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Stroke patients are three times more likely to receive clot-busting medication if treated at a certified stroke center, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Intravenous [tissue plasminogen activator](#) (tPA) is the only drug approved by the [Food and Drug Administration](#) for emergency treatment for people who have ischemic (clot-caused) stroke. The drug can reduce [stroke disability](#).

"The stroke center concept has rapidly taken off, and this data demonstrates one way that certified centers are doing better than non-certified centers," said Michael T. Mullen, M.D., the study's lead author and an assistant professor of neurology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The researchers examined [hospital discharge data](#) on 323,228 [ischemic stroke](#) patients from 26 states in 2004-09.

The clot-buster was administered to:

- 3.1 percent of patients overall;
- 6.7 percent of patients at primary stroke centers certified by the Joint Commission; and
- 2.2 percent of patients at other facilities.

After researchers adjusted for patient and facility characteristics, they found the likelihood of receiving tPA was still almost twice as high in certified stroke centers.

Over time, tPA use increased from 6 percent to 7.6 percent at certified primary stroke centers and 1.4 percent to 3.3 percent at non-certified hospitals.

During a stroke, blood flow must be restored quickly and tPA can only be administered in the first few hours after symptoms start.

"Between 10 percent to 15 percent of patients arriving at the hospital with ischemic strokes are eligible to receive tPA," said Eric Smith, M.D., chair of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke [quality improvement program](#) and an associate professor of neurology at the University of Calgary. "This research shows that the certification program seems to be working, and that treatment is improving over time."

Unlike the improvement in the percentage of patients receiving tPA, we haven't seen comparable improvements in the speed at which patients are evaluated and treated, and that is a major factor in determining outcome."

The [American Heart Association](#)/American Stroke Association's Target: Stroke program helps hospitals treat 50 percent or more of patients within the first hour after they arrive.

In conjunction with The Joint Commission, the association also offers certification to facilities that meet criteria as Comprehensive [Stroke Centers](#).

"We need more complete systems of care to make sure patients are getting to the best facility to treat their stroke—and getting there as quickly as possible," Smith said.

At the first sign of a stroke, call 9-1-1 to get to the facility that provides appropriate treatment. The American Stroke Association has more information and tools, including a new mobile app, that can help you recognize and respond to stroke symptoms.

Provided by American Heart Association

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