Blood clot guidelines challenge ‘economy class’ traveling risk

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Good news for budget-minded travelers: There’s no proof that flying economy-class increases your chances of dangerous blood clots, according to new guidelines from medical specialists.

Travelers’ blood doesn’t have to be alarmed, said Dr. Gordon Guyatt, something to be alarmed about, said Dr. Gordon Guyatt, chairman of an American College of Chest Physicians’ committee that wrote the new guidelines.

The group, based in Northbrook, Ill., represents more than 30,000 physicians whose specialties include lung disease and critical care. The guidelines were released online Tuesday in the group’s journal, Chest.

They’re based on a review of recent research and other medical evidence on deep vein thrombosis, blood clots that form deep in leg veins.

Flights lasting at least eight hours are riskiest, the guidelines say.

Muscles in the lower legs help push blood in the legs and feet back to the heart. Sitting for extended periods of time without using these muscles puts pressure on leg veins and blood “tends to sit there,” which can increase chance for clots to form, said Guyatt, a researcher at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. These clots can cause leg pain, swelling and tenderness, and can be threatening if they travel to the lungs. They can be treated with blood-thinning drugs, but may cause permanent damage to legs.

People who develop these clots have risk factors, including obesity, older age, recent surgery or absence of previous blood clots or use of birth control pills.

The average risk for a deep vein blood clot in the general population is about 1 per 1,000 each year. Long-haul travel doubles the chance, but still, the small risk should measure healthy travelers that they’re unlikely to develop clots.

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PHOENIX — Binge drinking is most common among young people, but providers can take steps to prevent the problem also places a red flag next to seniors.

It turns out that those 65 and older who engage in binge drinking do so more frequently than any other age group, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Dafna Kanny, senior scientist with the agency’s Alcohol Program, called the results surprising.

“We didn’t think we had a problem with the elderly, because prevalence was down in that age group,” she said.

The study released last month, defined binge drinking as a woman consuming four or more drinks and a man consuming five drinks within a “short period of time.” Based on data in the 2010 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, it found that the average binge drinker consumes an average amount of alcohol four times per month. Those 65 and older who binge drink were found to do an average of five to six times per month.

The true number of times senior citizen binge drinkers consume excessive amounts of alcohol could be even higher than that statistic, according to Kanny, because people metabolize alcohol less effectively with age. That means it takes fewer drinks for the elderly to get drunk.

Lisa Shumaker, office chief for prevention in the Arizona Department of Health Services’ Department of Behavioral Health, said doctors need to be trained to recognize that certain injuries in the elderly, such as falls, may be alcohol-related and to follow up appropriately.

“We have had doctors who are concerned with behavioral health patients who present symptoms, but they don’t have the resources to diagnose what the condition might be,” Shumaker said.

Report: Binge drinking, most common among young, is more intense for seniors

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