A DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT) DESCRIBES A BLOOD CLOT THAT FORMS IN THE DEEP VEINS LOCATED IN THE ARMS OR LEGS

Annually up to 900,000 people sustain a deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolus in the US. A blood clot in the deep veins is not dangerous. However, it becomes life-threatening if it breaks free and embolizes to the pulmonary arteries and lungs. This prevents blood from flowing to the lung and decreases oxygen absorption. A person may or may not have signs or symptoms of a small pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs), but a large embolism can be fatal.

Risk factors for blood clot formation include prolonged travel, hospitalization, surgery, trauma, pregnancy, obesity, immobility, genetic predisposition to blood clotting, injury to veins, presence of varicose veins, smoking, birth control pills, or cancer. Symptoms of DVT in the arm or leg include: pain, edema, warmth, and redness. Some or none of these symptoms may be present.

People with a swollen extremity or concern that a DVT exists may be cared for by a variety of health-care professionals.

Doctors can diagnose a DVT with blood testing, ultrasound imaging or alternative tests.

Treatment includes taking blood thinners (anticoagulants) unless contraindicated. In that situation, an inferior vena cava filter may be considered. The recommended length of treatment for an uncomplicated DVT is three months and in certain situations a longer duration of anticoagulation may be required.

To minimize the risk of developing a DVT or PE, it is recommend quit smoking, exercise regularly and when traveling get up and walk every couple of hours.