

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Posted by [petehurrey](#) On 03/05/2009

Did you know that more than 90 percent of colorectal cancer is found in people ages 50 years and over? The major risk factor for colorectal cancer is age. The key to early detection of colorectal cancer is screening.

When colorectal cancer is caught early, 90 percent of people can be cured. Screening is when people get tested for colorectal cancer when they are feeling healthy and before having any symptoms. Colorectal cancer may be present even when a person has no symptoms.

Polyps are small growths that occur commonly in the gut or colon. Colorectal cancer screening with the removal of adenomatous polyps has saved the lives of many people and decreased death from colorectal cancer. Still, colorectal cancer continues to be the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women in Maryland and the nation.

In Maryland, Calvert County ranks an alarming fifth for colorectal cancer deaths.

The American Cancer Society projected approximately 149,000 new colorectal cancer cases in the United States in 2008, and about 50,000 people are estimated to die from colorectal cancer. In Maryland, the ACS estimated 2,920 new cases and 940 deaths in 2008.

Who Should get Colorectal Cancer Screening?

The American Cancer Society recommends screening for:

- People ages 50 years and over.
- People under 50 years with:
 - o a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps – small growths that can turn into cancer;
 - o a person with a history of inflammatory bowel disease – ulcerative colitis, Crohn colitis; and
 - o Women who had cancer of the ovary or endometrium – womb.

Ask your doctor if you should get screened for colorectal cancer. Don't wait for your doctor to speak with you.

What are Signs and Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer does not usually produce symptoms in its early stages. You can look healthy, feel fine, and not know there may be a problem. If signs and symptoms are present, they may include:

- bleeding from the rectum or blood in the stool,
- change in bowel habits,
- abdominal mass,
- cramps, or pain, and
- iron deficiency anemia that is not caused by other conditions.

How is Colorectal Cancer Found?

There are several tests for colorectal cancer screening. One test is colonoscopy. Colonoscopy is a test where a doctor uses a long flexible tube with a light to look inside your large intestines – colon or gut. This test looks at the whole colon to find and remove polyps or find cancer.

What Services are Available in my Community?

The local health departments may help you get screened for colorectal cancer if you qualify. They may also provide colorectal cancer education to individuals and community groups. To request colorectal cancer education or find out if you qualify for a no-cost colorectal cancer screening, please contact the Calvert County Health Department at (410) 535-5400 or (301) 855-1353.