

CDC Encourages Screening for Breast, Cervical and Colorectal Cancers



Getting screened for some cancers can actually help prevent them from occurring. In particular, screening helps prevent cancers of the cervix, colon and rectum. Screening also helps find other cancers – such as breast cancer – at an early stage, when treatment can be most effective.

Because some cancers are found early and treatment options have improved, more and more people are living many years after a diagnosis. There are an estimated 10 million cancer survivors in the United States.

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in women in the United States. Having regular mammograms is the best way to detect breast cancer at an early stage, when treatment often is more effective and can reduce the risk of dying from the disease. It is recommended that women aged 40 years or older be screened using mammography every one to two years. On average, this screening test is about 80-90 percent effective at detecting breast cancer in its earliest stages.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States. It affects both men and women and risks increase with advancing age. More than 90 percent of colorectal cancers occur in adults aged 50 years or older.

Screening should begin at age 50. Those who think they're at increased risk should speak with their doctors about when to begin screening. Screening is recommended using one or more of these tests:

- Colonoscopy,
- Fecal occult blood test (stool test),
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy, and
- Double-contrast barium enema.

Screening helps find precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon and rectum, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening can also find colorectal cancer early, when treatment often leads to a cure.

Cervical cancer once was the leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States. But during the past four decades, deaths from this disease have declined significantly, mostly because of widespread use of the Pap test. This test can find abnormal cells in the cervix. If a Pap test shows there are abnormal cells that could become cancerous, a woman can be treated. In most cases, this treatment prevents cervical cancer from developing. Pap tests also can find cervical cancer early. When it is found early, the chance of being cured is very high.

What You Can Do

For adult women:

- Get a mammogram every one to two years beginning at age 40.
- Get a Pap test at least every three years, within three years of onset of sexual activity—or at age 21, whichever comes first.

For men and women aged 50 years or older:

- Speak with your doctor about getting screened for colorectal cancer, using one or more of the recommended screening tests, which are: colonoscopy, fecal occult blood test (FOBT), flexible sigmoidoscopy, and double contrast barium enema. Generally, if results from an FOBT, sigmoidoscopy, or barium enema show there may be a problem, a colonoscopy will be necessary as a follow-up procedure, as that is the only test that allows a doctor to both examine the entire colon and to remove most precancerous polyps and abnormal growths.
- If you have questions about the various screening tests, please speak with your doctor.

Through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides access to free or low cost screening to women who are under- or uninsured. In addition, CDC is funding colorectal cancer screening pilot programs in five sites in the United States. To learn more about these programs and about cancer prevention and control, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer>.