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For Immediate Release

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Colon Cancer: Preventable, Beatable and Treatable

“Colon cancer is preventable, beatable and treatable,” said Dorrann Hultman, a public health nurse with South Heartland District Health Department. “Here in south central Nebraska,” she says, “rates of colorectal cancer diagnosis and death are higher compared to the United States overall.”

This is why anyone age 50 and older should get tested and continue testing on a regular basis.

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends regular screening, beginning at age 50, using high-sensitivity fecal occult blood testing (FOBT), sigmoidoscopy, or colonoscopy. Hultman says evidence suggests that regular colon screening reduces death from colorectal cancer because these tests can find precancerous growths called polyps. These polyps can be removed before they turn in to cancer.

Colorectal polyps and colorectal cancer don’t always have symptoms. However, things like blood in or on your stool, stomach pain, aches, cramps that don’t go away or losing weight without knowing why may indicate problems with the colon and should be checked by your health care provider.

Here is a brief description of each test recommended by the USPSTF and the recommended interval of testing:

- High sensitivity fecal occult blood test (FOBT) checks for hidden blood in three consecutive stool samples and should be done every year.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy is where a doctor uses a flexible, lighted tube (sigmoidoscope) to look at the walls of the rectum and part of the colon. This test is done every five years.
- Colonoscopy is where a doctor uses a colonoscope to look at the walls of the rectum and the entire colon. This test is done every 10 years. Colonoscopies are also used as a follow up procedure if positive results are found on either FOBT or sigmoidoscopy.

Hultman says there is no single test that is the ‘right’ one for everyone. “The best test is the one that gets done!” she said. “So talk with your medical provider about the benefits and risks of each screening option as well as your family history, personal risk factors and preferences to help determine which screening test is best for you.”

Most insurance plans, including Medicare, help pay for colorectal cancer screening. Hultman recommends checking with your health insurance provider for your colorectal cancer screening benefits.

During National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March, South Heartland District Health Department and the South Heartland Cancer Coalition are offering free FOBT kits to complete at home.

To get your FREE screening kit, stop by the South Heartland District Health Department at 606 N. Minnesota, Suite 2, Hastings, NE, or call the health department at 402-462-6211 (toll free at 1-877-238-7595). Kits will also be available in pharmacies in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties, and at area health fairs, including Vital Signs Health Fair on March 25-26 at Adams County Fairgrounds.

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