



Colon Cancer: Preventable, Beatable and Treatable

Governor Ricketts has officially proclaimed March as Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month for the State of Nebraska.

Colorectal (colon and rectum) cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Nebraska. Colorectal cancer occurs more often in Nebraska than the rest of the nation. Colon cancer death rates are about 30-40 percent higher among men compared to women both in Nebraska and throughout the U.S. Colorectal cancer affects all racial and ethnic groups and is most often found in people age 50 and older.

The South Heartland District Health Department and the South Heartland Cancer Coalition have the following message for residents of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster County, "If you're 50 and older, get tested and continue a lifetime pattern of screening at recommended times."

Screening for colorectal cancer saves lives. Pre-cancerous polyps found early can be removed before becoming cancerous. Cancers found at an early stage can be treated when best outcomes are possible.

Polyps or cancer in the colon or rectum don't always cause symptoms so, without screening, changes may be taking place that you don't know about. However, if you begin to notice blood in or on your stool, have stomach pain, aches, cramps that don't go away or are losing weight without knowing why, this may indicate problems with the colon and should be checked by your medical provider.

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends regular screening, using high-sensitivity fecal occult blood testing (FOBT), sigmoidoscopy, or colonoscopy beginning at age 50 and continuing until age 75 years.

The FOBT is an easy at home test where you collect small stool samples on a card and send to a lab. This screening should be done once a year. Sigmoidoscopy is a procedure done by the doctor who looks for polyps or cancer in the rectum and lower third of the colon. It is done every 5 years. If positive results are found on either FOBT or sigmoidoscopy, then colonoscopy should be done.

Colonoscopy is a procedure done by the doctor that looks for polyps or cancer in the rectum and the entire colon. Colonoscopy is done every 10 years or as advised by your medical provider.

You decide which screening method is best for you - but remember that the best screening method is the one that gets done! 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. If you have certain risk factors, you may need to start screening before age 50 and be tested more often than other people.

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

What steps can you take to lower your risk?

1. Get screened if you are 50 or older.
2. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains from breads, cereals, nuts, and beans.
3. Eat a low-fat diet.
4. Eat foods with folate such as leafy green vegetables. A daily multivitamin containing 0.4 milligrams of folic acid may also be helpful.
5. If you use alcohol, drink only in moderation.
6. If you use tobacco, quit. If you don't use tobacco, don't start.
7. Exercise for at least 20 minutes three to four days each week. Moderate exercise such as walking, gardening, or climbing steps may help reduce your risk.

During National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March, South Heartland District Health Department and 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 us at 402-462-6211 (toll free at 1-877-238-7595). Kits will also be available in pharmacies in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties, at Vital Signs Health Fair and other local health fairs.

For more information on colorectal cancer, visit The Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program website: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/PublicHealth/NCP/> or South Heartland's website: www.southheartlandhealth.org.

"Don't put it off, make a commitment today to get screened for colorectal cancer and take measures to lower your risk"!

Dorrann Hultman is a public health nurse with South Heartland District Health Department. She may be reached at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.