

Breast Cancer Basics

Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer.¹ In Montana, an average of 800 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.²

Many conditions can cause lumps in the breast, including cancer. But most breast lumps are caused by other medical conditions.

Sometimes breast cells become abnormal. These abnormal cells grow, divide, and create new cells that the body does not need and that do not function normally. The extra cells form a mass called a tumor.

Some tumors are "benign" or not cancer. These tumors usually stay in one spot in the breast and do not cause big health problems. Other tumors are "malignant" and are cancer.

Breast cancer often starts out too small to be felt. As it grows, it can spread throughout the breast or to other parts of the body. This causes serious health problems and can cause death.³

Screening for Breast Cancer

Breast cancer screening means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before there are signs or symptoms of the disease.³ The likelihood of surviving breast cancer increases when the cancer is detected at an early stage.

Nearly 90% of women in Montana with localized breast cancer (not invading the surrounding tissue) survived at least 10 years after diagnosis, while fewer than 10% diagnosed with distant breast cancer (spread from the original tumor) survived 10 years.²

Mammograms

Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best method to detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms.

If you are age 40 years or older, be sure to have a screening mammogram every 1 to 2 years. Talk to your doctor if you have any breast symptoms or changes in your breast, or if breast cancer runs in your family. He or she may recommend that you have mammograms before age 40 or more often than usual.¹

Insurance Coverage

Since 1991, Montana law has mandated that breast cancer screening using mammography be covered by health insurance. Additional laws have since been enacted, and cover aspects of reimbursement for reconstruction, alternative therapies, treatment and care.⁴

Insurance carriers in Montana must provide:

- One baseline mammogram for a woman who is 35 - 40 years of age;
- A mammogram every 2 years for any woman 40 - 50 years of age, or more frequently if recommended by the woman's physician;
- A mammogram each year for a woman who is 50 years old and older.³

Help Paying for a Mammogram

The Montana Cancer Screening Program provides mammograms, clinical breast exams, Pap tests and pelvic exams for the early detection of breast and cervical cancer. These services may be provided free to eligible women. **Call toll-free 1-888-803-9343**

1 National Cancer Institute

2 Montana Central Tumor Registry Annual Report 2009

3 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

4 Montana Code Annotated 33-22-132

