

Colorectal Cancer Basics

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the tissues of the colon or the rectum. Polyps are abnormal growths that protrude from the inner wall of the colon or rectum. They are relatively common in people over age 50. Most polyps are benign (noncancerous), but experts believe that the majority of colorectal cancers develop in polyps known as adenomas. Detecting and removing these growths may help prevent colorectal cancer.¹

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, and is most often found in people aged 50 years or older.²

Colorectal Cancer in Montana

Colorectal cancer is common in Montana: approximately 470 people are newly diagnosed and 170 people die from it each year.³

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in Montana for both men and women, after prostate and lung cancer for men and breast and lung cancer for women.

Among Montanans with colorectal cancer, more than 95% survive at least five years if their cancer is diagnosed at the local stage, but only 15% survive at least five years if their cancer is diagnosed at the distant stage.³

Early Detection

Colorectal cancer screening saves lives. Screening can find and remove precancerous polyps before they turn into cancer. Screening also helps find colorectal cancer at an early stage, when treatment often leads to a cure.

People who have polyps or colorectal cancer don't always have symptoms, especially at first. Someone could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it.

People aged 50 or older, and those who may be at higher than average risk for colorectal cancer should speak with their doctor about getting screened.²

Screening Recommendations

Several different screening tests can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends colorectal cancer screening for men and women aged 50-75, and earlier than age 50 if at increased risk due to a personal or family history or risk factors. Screening test recommendations from the USPSTF include:

- Every year: high-sensitivity fecal occult blood testing (FOBT) *or*
- Every five years: flexible sigmoidoscopy with high-sensitivity fecal occult blood testing every 3 years *or*
- Every ten years: colonoscopy

An informed decision-making discussion between individuals and their health care provider determines which test is best for them. The best test is the one completed.

Many insurance plans and Medicare help pay for colorectal cancer screening tests. Check with your plan to find out which tests are covered for you. If you are unable to pay for a colorectal cancer screening test, assistance may be available to you through the Montana Cancer Screening Program. Call toll free 1-888-803-9343.



1 National Cancer Institute

2 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

3 Cancer in Montana 2003-2007, Montana Central Tumor Registry Annual Report, 2009