
Colorectal Cancer Fact Sheet

Most colorectal cancer can be prevented or cured

Screening (or testing) for colorectal cancer (that is, cancer of the colon or rectum) can save lives. When colorectal cancer is found at an early stage, it can be cured. A polyp can turn into colorectal cancer. Polyps can be taken out before they grow into cancer.

People who should be screened for colorectal cancer include:

- Anyone 50 years old and older; and
- Anyone under 50 years old who:
 - has had any of the following: colorectal cancer in the past, an “adenomatous polyp,” inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s colitis), or cancer of the ovary or endometrium;
 - has a mother, father, brother, sister, or child who had colorectal cancer or an adenomatous polyp; or
 - has a family history of genetic forms of colorectal cancer or polyps.

Screening for colorectal cancer

There are two main ways to be screened (tested) if you have an average risk of colorectal cancer:

- **Colonoscopy**; *or*
- **Fecal occult blood test** once a year, **along with** a **sigmoidoscopy** once every five years.

Colonoscopy and **sigmoidoscopy** are special tests where a doctor uses a long, flexible tube with a light (scope) to look inside your large intestines (colon). Colonoscopy looks at the whole colon. Sigmoidoscopy looks at the lower third of the colon.

Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) looks for blood in the stool or feces—even when you cannot see the blood. The stool samples are collected at home from bowel movements on separate days. The test is then mailed in to a doctor or lab for results. Some medicines and some foods may affect results of some types of tests. Blood can be in the stool because of cancer, but also because of problems other than cancer. Sometimes the test does *not* show blood even when a person has a cancer. That is why an FOBT is not the only test a person needs.

Colorectal cancer in Maryland

There were 2,549 people in Maryland diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2002 and 1,078 people died of colorectal cancer in Maryland that year.

People with colorectal cancer usually do **not** have symptoms, but sometimes they have:

- blood in the stool;
- a mass or lump in the abdomen;
- cramps or pain in the abdomen; or
- change in the size of the stool (for example, the stool is thinner) or constipation.

Call your doctor to find out more about getting screened for colorectal cancer.

Call your doctor if you have symptoms of colorectal cancer.

Web sites of interest:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife>

Cancer Information Services: <http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov/>

American College of Gastroenterology: <http://www.acg.gi.org/>

American Cancer Society: <http://www.cancer.org>

National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable: <http://www.nccrt.org/>

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene • Center for Cancer Surveillance and Control

Updated 6/2009