



MAIN OFFICE
1250 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, ID 83401
Phone: (208) 522-0310
Fax: (208) 525-7063
www.phd7.idaho.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 2012

Contact: Geri Rackow, PIO
Office: (208) 533-3155
Cell: (208) 705-4615

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Men and women aged 50 and older are at an increased risk

Colorectal cancer (cancer of the colon and rectum) kills many people in Idaho every year. March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, so it's a good time to learn more about the disease and how it can be prevented so that in the future, one of those lives lost isn't your own or that of someone you love.

Colorectal Cancer Screening Saves Lives

Since there are very few symptoms associated with colorectal cancer, regular screening is essential. Screening is beneficial for two main reasons: colorectal cancer is extremely preventable if polyps (abnormal growths in the colon or rectum) are detected and removed before they develop into cancer and colorectal cancer is very treatable and curable if detected in its early stages. It is estimated that as many as 60% of colorectal cancer deaths could be prevented if all men and women aged 50 years and older were screened routinely.

Screening Tests for Colorectal Cancer

There are several types of screening tests for colorectal cancer but "Colonoscopy remains the gold standard for colorectal cancer screening and is a very safe and effective procedure when performed by a physician with specialized training," says Dane Dickson, MD, an oncologist in Rexburg, Idaho. Unfortunately, many patients referred for colonoscopy fail to complete the procedure, due to a variety of reason including: cost, scheduling challenges, long waiting times, and modesty and privacy concerns.

Mountain View Hospital, in partnership with various surgeons and gastro-enterologists in the community, has developed a colon cancer screening program called *Open Access*. Open Access addresses these concerns and makes getting a colonoscopy easier and more cost effective than ever. If you have any questions about the Open Access program, please contact Chelsey Anderson at Mountain View Hospital at (208) 557-2726.

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Who Should Be Screened for Colorectal Cancer

The risk of developing colorectal cancer increases with age. Men and women aged 50 and older are at an increased risk for developing colorectal cancer and should be screened at least every 5-10 years. Some people are at higher risk and should be screened at an age younger than 50, including those with a personal family history of inflammatory bowel disease, colorectal cancer or polyps.

Reducing Your Risk for Colorectal Cancer

To lower your risk for colorectal cancer, the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons recommends:

- Getting regular colorectal cancer screenings beginning at age 50.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Eating a low-fat, high-fiber diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Using alcohol only in moderation and quitting tobacco if you use it. Alcohol and tobacco in combination are linked to colorectal cancer and many other cancers.
- Engaging in physical activity for at least 20 minutes, three to four days each week.

If you are aged 50 or older, or think you may be at risk for colorectal cancer, speak with a healthcare professional or your doctor about getting screened. If you have any questions about this article or are interested in more information about colorectal cancer, please call Mimi Morgan (533-3151) at Eastern Idaho Public Health District.



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