



St. Lawrence County Public Health Department

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March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Canton, NY— Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month is observed in March to highlight the importance of screening for colorectal cancer and to promote healthy lifestyle habits that can decrease your risk of developing colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer in the United States. It is estimated that 151,030 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer this year and 52,580 could die, according to the American Cancer Society.

Colorectal cancer may not cause symptoms, particularly at first. Someone can have colon cancer or rectal cancer and not know it. The most common symptom of colorectal cancer is no symptom at all. That is why it is often called the silent killer. When symptoms do occur, they may include: changing bowel habits, persistent abdominal discomfort, rectal bleeding including blood in your stool, weakness and/or fatigue, and unexplained weight loss.

Screening is the number one way you can prevent colorectal cancer. Colon cancer and rectal cancer are also highly treatable if caught early. That's why on-time screening is essential and lifesaving. Colorectal cancer almost always develops from precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon or rectum. Screening tests can find precancerous polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening can also find colorectal cancer early when treatment works best.

"It all hit home when the Doctor came into the room after my colonoscopy. He told me if I had waited until I was having health issues, he probably wouldn't have been able to do much to help me," states Ray Babowicz, Director of Communications and Marketing, Community Health Center of the North Country.

All men and women without a family history of colorectal cancer should begin colorectal cancer screenings at age 45. You may need to be screened earlier than 45 if you have certain risk factors such as inflammatory bowel disease, family history of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps, or lifestyle factors that may contribute to an increased risk of colorectal cancer.

Colonoscopy is considered the most effective screening option for colon cancer, but there are other screening tests available including fecal immunochemical test (FIT). A FIT test checks for hidden blood in the stool. If a FIT test returns abnormal results, a colonoscopy will be necessary.

“Don’t let fear stop you from getting screened. A 30-minute procedure had probably just saved my life,” says Mr. Babowicz.

Along with screening tests, you may be able to lower your colorectal cancer risk with some simple lifestyle changes:

- Eat well;
- Regular physical activity;
- Know your family history;
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco.

When it comes to screening, tomorrow can’t wait. Talk to your health care provider about when to begin screening, which test is best for you, and how often to get tested.

For more information, visit CDC’s Colorectal Cancer webpage at https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening/tests.htm.

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