

Colorectal cancer awareness

Colorectal cancer starts in the inner lining of the rectum or colon. The cancers are grouped together because they have many of the same features. Here are some facts about colorectal cancer:

- Colorectal cancer begins as polyps, or growths that may change into cancer over time. Less common cancers start in the digestive tract, connective tissues or lymph nodes.
- One in three Americans aren't up to date with their colorectal cancer screenings, but 60% of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented with screenings and early detection.
- If you have a first-degree relative who has this type of cancer, you have two to three times the risk of developing the disease.
- Incidences are dropping for people older than 50, possibly because of a large increase in testing.
- Incidences are rising for people younger than 50 and now account for one in 10 cases. This may be due to a lack of education about symptoms or access to health care.



One in 23 Americans are at risk for developing colorectal cancer over their lifetimes. Some risks factors can't be changed, such as age, family history and racial or ethnic background. There are also some lifestyle risks that increase chances for colorectal cancer:

- Being overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity
- A diet high in red meat and processed meats
- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol use
- Type 2 diabetes

If you have any of these factors, you need to be aware of symptoms, such as:

- A change in bowel habits
- Persistent abdominal pain or discomfort
- Blood in the stool
- Weakness or fatigue accompanied by unexplained weight loss

Every year, more than 100,000 Americans are diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Fortunately, there are some things you can do to help reduce your risks:

- Talk to your doctor about screening. Early polyp removal can prevent them from turning into cancer.
- Address lifestyle risks. The World Cancer Research Fund estimates that about 20% of all cancers diagnosed in the U.S. are related to excess weight, physical inactivity, excess alcohol consumption and poor nutrition.

Sources: cancer.org*, ccalliance.org*

*Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network don't own or control these websites.