
Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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. Some polyps 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 uterus;
 - has a mother, father, brother, sister, or child who had colorectal cancer or certain adenomatous polyps before age 60 years; or
 - has a family history of genetic forms of colorectal cancer or polyps.

Screening for colorectal cancer

These are the main ways to be screened if you have an **average risk** of colorectal cancer:

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

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

Fecal occult blood test (FOBT or FIT) checks for blood in the stool or feces--even when you cannot see the blood. Blood can be in the stool because of cancer, but also because of other problems. Sometimes the test does *not* show blood even when a person has a cancer. That is why an FOBT or FIT is best done along with a sigmoidoscopy. The stool samples are taken at home. The test kit is then mailed in for results. Medicines and foods may affect test results of some types of tests.

Colorectal cancer in Maryland

There were 2,269 new cases and 986 deaths in Maryland in 2009 due to colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer deaths accounted for about 9.5% of all cancer deaths in Maryland in 2009. (Source: Maryland Cancer Registry and Maryland Vital Statistics).

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

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

Call your doctor to find out more about being screened.

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>
National Cancer Institute: <http://www.cancer.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/>