

# Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month



## Colorectal (Colon) Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or rectum. Sometimes it is called colon cancer, for short. As the drawing shows, the colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus.

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, and is most often found in people aged 50 years or older. For men, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer after prostate and lung cancers. For women, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer after breast and lung cancers.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States, but it doesn't have to be. If everybody aged 50 or older had regular screening tests, as many as 60% of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented.

Colorectal cancer screening saves lives. Screening can find precancerous polyps—abnormal growths in the colon or rectum—so that they can be removed before turning into cancer. Screening also helps find colorectal cancer at an early stage, when treatment often leads to a cure.

If you are aged 50 or older, or think you may be at higher than average risk for colorectal cancer, speak with your doctor about getting screened.

## Fast Facts

Colorectal cancer—cancer of the colon or rectum—is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. In 2004, more than 53,000 people in the United States died of colorectal cancer (26,881 men and 26,699 women).<sup>1\*</sup>

Colorectal cancer also is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in the United States. In 2004, more than 145,000 people in the United States were diagnosed with colorectal cancer (73,997 men and 71,086 women), making it the third most common cancer in men and in women.<sup>1</sup>

Findings from CDC's 2000 National Health Interview Survey indicate that many people who are at risk for colorectal cancer are not being screened.<sup>2</sup> Although screening rates are beginning to rise, they remain too low to achieve the Healthy People 2010 objective for reducing mortality from colorectal cancer. In 2004, approximately 57% of adults aged 50 years

or older reported having received a fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or lower endoscopy within 1 year of being surveyed by CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, compared with 54% of adults surveyed in 2002.<sup>5</sup>

A recent CDC study demonstrated that:

- Approximately 41.8 million average-risk people aged 50 or older have not been screened for colorectal cancer according to national guidelines.
- The U.S. health care system has enough capacity to conduct widespread screening of the unscreened population, using FOBT and diagnostic colonoscopy for those with a positive FOBT.
- Widespread screening with flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy may take up to 10 years, depending on the



\*Incidence counts cover approximately 98% of the U.S. population. Death counts cover 100% of the U.S. population. Use caution in comparing incidence and death counts.

### References

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Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)