

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Of cancers that affect both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States and the third most common cancer in men and in women. More than 140,000 Americans are diagnosed and more than 50,000 die from the disease each year. Colorectal cancer affects all racial and ethnic groups, it is most often found in people aged 50 years or older, and the risk for developing this cancer increases with age.

To help combat this disease, Medicare provides coverage for screening and the early detection of colorectal cancer. All Medicare beneficiaries aged 50 and older are covered; however, when a beneficiary is at high risk, there is no minimum age required to receive a screening colonoscopy (or a barium enema rendered as an alternative). Medicare defines high risk of developing colorectal cancer as someone who has one or more of the following risk factors:

- A close relative (sibling, parent, or child) who has had colorectal cancer or an adenomatous polyp
- Family history of familial adenomatous polyposis
- Family history of hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer
- Personal history of adenomatous polyps
- Personal history of colorectal cancer
- Personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, including Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis

Medicare pays for the following colorectal cancer screening services:

- Fecal Occult Blood Test
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- Barium Enema (as an alternative to a covered screening flexible sigmoidoscopy or a screening colonoscopy)

What Can You Do?

About nine out of every 10 people whose colorectal cancer is found early and treated are still alive five years later. CMS needs your help to promote the early detection and prevention of colorectal cancer. As a provider of healthcare services to seniors and other people with Medicare, you can help increase their awareness of colorectal cancer. Talk with them about colorectal cancer. Inform them about their risk factors and help them understand the importance of early detection. Encourage seniors to take full advantage of colorectal cancer screenings covered by Medicare, as appropriate. Your recommendation can help save lives! Colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable, and beatable.

More Information for Healthcare Professionals:

- [MLN Guide to Medicare Preventive Services for Healthcare Professionals](#) (see Chapter 11)
- [MLN Preventive Services Educational Products Webpage](#)
- [MLN Cancer Screenings Brochure](#)
- [MLN Quick Reference Information: Medicare Preventive Services](#)
- [National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable](#)
- [National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month website](#)