

Fact Sheet

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States. Despite being one of the most preventable types of cancer, over 50,000 deaths from colorectal cancer occur each year. African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives are disproportionately affected. Health care providers recommend routine screening starting at age 45, or earlier if you are at higher risk.

Office of Minority Health and Health Equity

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer usually develops from polyps or other precancerous growths in the large intestine (comprised of the colon and rectum). The cancer cells may spread from the growth to other parts of the body in advanced stages.



Who is affected by colorectal cancer?

Most cases of colorectal cancer occur in people over the age of 50, but rates are going up for younger adults. African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives have the highest rates of colorectal cancer. Factors that increase your risk of colorectal cancer include:

- Family or personal history of colorectal cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, or other intestinal conditions
- Type 2 diabetes
- Lack of exercise
- Overweight or obese
- Tobacco use
- Consumption of three or more alcoholic drinks per day

What are the symptoms of colorectal cancer?

Colorectal polyps and colorectal cancer don't always cause symptoms, especially at first. If you have symptoms, they may include:

- Changes in bowel movements
- Vomiting
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Sudden weight loss
- Narrow or bloody stools
- Gas pains or cramps
- Feeling your bowel is not fully empty
- Feeling tired or weak

What should I know about screening?

Several non-invasive screening tests are available that can find precancerous changes in stool, tissues, blood, and genes. How often you need to be screened depends on the type of test selected.

If colorectal cancer is found early and treated properly, the survival rate is high for 9 out of 10 people. Health care providers recommend routine screening starting at age 45, or earlier if you are at higher risk.

How is colorectal cancer treated?

Your health care provider will recommend treatment based on the stage of the cancer and your overall health. Several medications act to destroy cancer cells or block them from spreading. Other medications boost the body's immune system. Cancerous cells can also be surgically removed or destroyed by FDA-approved treatments like freezing, radiation, or chemical injection.

Colorectal cancer and clinical trials

The FDA encourages diverse participation in clinical trials. If you think a clinical trial may be right for you, talk to your health care provider. You can also search for clinical trials in your area at www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For more information on health equity, visit www.fda.gov/healthequity.