

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



April, 2009

Cancer - Just The Facts

Cancer is a group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. If the spread is not controlled, it can result in death.

Cancer is caused by both external factors (tobacco, chemicals, radiation, and infectious organisms) and internal factors (inherited mutations, hormones, immune conditions, and mutations that occur from metabolism).

These causal factors may act together or in sequence to initiate or promote carcinogenesis. Cancer is treated with surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, biological therapy, and targeted therapy.

Can Cancer Be Prevented?

All cancers caused by cigarette smoking and heavy use of alcohol can be prevented completely. Certain cancers are related to infectious agents, such as hepatitis B virus (HBV), human papillomavirus (HPV), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), *Helicobacter pylori* (*H.pylori*), and others, and could be prevented through behavioral changes, vaccines, or antibiotics.



Reduce your risk of skin cancer by limiting your exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest. While outdoors, apply sunscreen liberally (don't forget the lips and ears!), wear a hat and sunglasses, and cover up with clothing. And remember, if you notice changes to your skin such as a new growth, a mole changing appearance, or a sore that won't heal, see a doctor right way.

Regular screening examinations by a health care professional can result in the detection and removal of precancerous growths, as well as the diagnosis of cancers at an early stage when they are most treatable.

Screening can prevent cancers of the cervix, colon, and rectum by allowing removal of precancerous

tissue before it becomes malignant. Screening can detect cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, cervix, prostate, oral cavity, and skin at early stages. For most of these cancers, early detection has been proven to reduce mortality. A heightened awareness of breast changes or skin changes may also result in detection of these tumors at earlier stages. Cancers that can be prevented or detected earlier by screening account for at least half of all new cancer cases.

Who Gets Skin Cancer, and Why?

Sun exposure is the biggest cause of skin cancer. But it doesn't explain skin cancers that develop on skin not ordinarily

(Over)

Cancer - Just The Facts

(Continued)

exposed to sunlight. Exposure to environmental hazards, radiation treatment, and even heredity may play a role. Although anyone can get skin cancer, the risk is greatest for people who have:

- Fair skin or light-colored eyes.
- An abundance of large and irregularly-shaped moles.
- A family history of skin cancer.
- A history of excessive sun exposure or blistering sunburns.
- Lived at high altitudes or with year-round sunshine
- Received radiation treatments.

Sources: Webmd.com and American Cancer Society, cancer.org.

Benefits Corner

CHP Preventative Cancer Screening

CHP covers mammogram screening and prostate screenings under the preventative benefit/adult services. This in network level of benefit is covered at the 80/20 co-insurance, and not subject to deductible if applicable.

Colorectal cancer screenings are also covered under the preventative benefit/ adult services. This in network level of benefit is covered at the 80/20 co-insurance for both male and female, and not subject to co-payment or deductible if applicable.

See the Preventative Section in the County Health Pool Plan Documents on page 19. The Plan Document is available on www.ctsi.org.

Questions About Colon Cancer Screening Exams

Colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy are excellent screening exams for colorectal cancer (commonly referred to as “colon cancer”). But false information and a misplaced sense of modesty have scared some people away from these lifesaving tests. Here are some questions you might have and some answers for them:

What is a sigmoidoscopy? During a sigmoidoscopy, a doctor closely inspects the lower parts of the colon, called the sigmoid colon and the descending colon, for signs of cancer or polyps. The exam takes 15 to 20 minutes and the patient usually doesn't need medicine.

What is a colonoscopy? A colonoscopy is an exam that allows

a doctor to see and closely look at the inside of the entire colon for signs of cancer or polyps. Polyps are small growths that over time can become cancer. The exam itself takes 15 to 30 minutes. Patients are usually given medicine to help them relax, which often puts them to sleep during the procedure. It's important for people to talk with their doctor to understand their personal risk for getting colon cancer, the guidelines they should follow for testing, and whether they need to start being tested at age 50 or earlier.

Why are these tests so important? Removing polyps prevents colorectal cancer from ever starting. And cancers found in an early stage are more easily treated. Nine out of 10 people whose colon cancer is discovered

early will be alive 5 years later. And many will live normal lifespans.

But too often people don't get these tests. Then the cancer can grow and spread unnoticed, like a silent invader. In many cases, by the time people have any symptoms the cancer is very advanced and very difficult to treat.

Sources: Webmd.com and American Cancer Society, cancer.org.

