

## Colorectal Cancer is Preventable and Treatable – Your Recommendation Can Help Save Lives

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month – a time to encourage everyone over the age of 50 to get screened regularly for colorectal cancer. The risk of getting colorectal cancer increases with age. More than 90 percent of cases occur in people who are 50 years old or older. Colorectal cancer often can be prevented. Regular screening can find precancerous polyps so they can be removed before they turn into cancer and screening can find colorectal cancer early, when treatment can be effective.

### *Medicare Coverage*

Medicare defines high risk of developing colorectal cancer as someone who has one or more of the following risk factors:

- 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, or
- Personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, including Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis.

All Medicare beneficiaries age 50 and older, who are **not** at high risk for colorectal cancer, and meet certain eligibility requirements are covered for the following screening services:

- Screening Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) every year,
- Screening Flexible Sigmoidoscopy once every 4 years (unless a screening colonoscopy has been performed and then Medicare may cover a screening sigmoidoscopy after at least 119 months) ,
- Screening Colonoscopy every 10 years (unless a screening flexible sigmoidoscopy has been performed and then Medicare may cover a screening colonoscopy only after at least 47 months), and
- Screening Barium Enema (as an alternative to a covered screening flexible sigmoidoscopy).

All Medicare beneficiaries age 50 and older, who are at high risk for colorectal cancer, and meet certain eligibility requirements are covered for the following screening services:

- Screening FOBT every year,
- Screening Flexible Sigmoidoscopy once every 4 years,
- Screening Colonoscopy every 2 years (unless a screening flexible sigmoidoscopy has been performed and then Medicare may cover a screening colonoscopy only after at least 47 months), and
- Screening Barium Enema (as an alternative to a covered screening colonoscopy).

### *What Can You Do?*

Screening and early detection saves lives. Your help is needed to increase awareness of colorectal cancer and ensure that more people with Medicare take advantage of colorectal cancer screening services, as appropriate.

- Talk with your patients about colorectal cancer and the importance of getting screened for colorectal cancer and other ways to reduce the risk of the disease, such as not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising, eating less red meat, and consuming alcohol in moderation or not at all.
- Inform your patients about their risk factors and the role screening plays in early detection and prevention.
- Remind your patients when they are due for a colorectal cancer screening.
- Encourage your patients to take full advantage of the colorectal cancer screenings covered by Medicare.

### *For More Information*

- [MLN Preventive Services Educational Products for Health Professionals](#)
- [CMS Prevention Web Site](#)
- [United States Preventive Services Task Force \(USPSTF\)](#)
- [National Cancer Institute at National Institutes of Health](#)