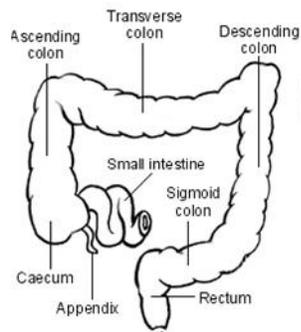# Colorectal Cancer Fact Sheet

Screening Saves Lives

In Lancaster Counter, colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death for women and along with prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death for men, but it doesn't have to be. **If everybody age 50 or older had regular screening tests, at least <u>one-third</u> of deaths from this cancer could be avoided.**

What is Colorectal Cancer?

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.

Who Gets Colorectal Cancer?

- Both men and women can get colorectal cancer.
- Colorectal cancer is most often found in people 50 and older.
- The risk for getting colorectal cancer increases with age.

Are You at High Risk?

Your risk for colorectal cancer may be higher than average if:

- You or a close relative have had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- You have inflammatory bowel disease.

People at high risk for colorectal cancer may need earlier or more frequent tests than other people. Talk to your health care provider about when you should begin screening and how often you should be tested.

Why is screening important?

If you're 50 or older, getting a screening test for colorectal cancer could save your life. Here's how:

Colon Polyp

- Colorectal cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum. A polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there.
- Over time, some polyps can turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can find polyps, so they can be removed *before* they turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early. When it is found early, the chance of being cured is good.

Colorectal Cancer Can Start With No Symptoms

People who have polyps or colorectal cancer sometimes don't have symptoms, especially at first. This means that someone could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it. That is why having a screening test is so important.

What are the Symptoms?

Some people with colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer do have symptoms. They may include:

- Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement).
- Pain, aches, or cramps in your stomach that happen a lot and you don't know why.
- A change in bowel habits, such as having stools that are narrower than usual.
- Losing weight and you don't know why.

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your health care provider. These symptoms may also be caused by something other than cancer. However, the only way to know what is causing them is to see your health care provider.

Types of Screening Tests

There are several different screening tests that can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer. Each one can be used alone. Sometimes they are used in combination with each other. Talk to your health care provider about which tests are right for you and how often you should be tested.

- **Colonoscopy**

This test is similar to flexible sigmoidoscopy, except the doctor uses a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube to check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the entire colon. During the test, the doctor can find and remove most polyps and some cancers. **How Often:** This test should be done every 10 years.

- **Cologuard Stool DNA Testing**

Exact Sciences will mail you a test kit that you will then mail back to the company with a stool sample. If the test is abnormal, you should have a colonoscopy. **How Often:** This test should be done every 3 years.

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test or Stool Tests**

For this test, you receive a test kit from your doctor or health care provider. At home, you put a small piece of stool on a test card. You do this for three bowel movements in a row. Then you return the test cards to the doctor or a lab. The stool samples are checked for blood. **How Often:** This should be tested yearly.

Will Insurance or Medicare Pay for Screening Tests?

Many insurance plans and Medicare help pay for colorectal cancer screening tests. Check with your plan to find out which tests are covered for you. To find out about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). If you are un-insured please talk with your healthcare provider about Project Access of Lancaster County (PALCO).

The Bottom Line

If you're 50 or older, talk with your doctor about getting screened.

For more information and a video of a colonoscopy go to: www.lancastergeneral.org/Media/Health/VodCast/Colonoscopy/colonoscopy.wmv