

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Please join with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in promoting increased awareness of colorectal cancer and the colorectal cancer screening benefit covered by Medicare. Colorectal cancer is largely preventable through screening, which can find colon growths called polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening can also detect cancer early when it is easier to treat and cure.

Screening for colorectal cancer is recommended for all adults ages 50 and older, although screening may start at younger ages for individuals who are at high risk for colon cancer.

Medicare covers the following screening tests to detect colorectal cancer earlier, while it is most treatable, and to identify people at high risk for developing this type of cancer:

- Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) – Medicare covers both guaiac and immunoassay tests, but Medicare will only pay for one FOBT every 12 months
- Screening Colonoscopy – Medicare covers once every 10 years for normal risk (but not within 48 months of a screening sigmoidoscopy); once every 24 months for high-risk persons
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy – Medicare covers once every 4 years
- Barium Enema – Medicare covers once every 4 years for normal risk; every 2 years for high-risk persons; your doctor may decide to use this test instead of a flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy

Beneficiaries in the Original Medicare Plan pay nothing for the FOBT. For all other screening tests, the coinsurance or copayment applies, but the Medicare Part B deductible is waived. However, if a screening test results in a biopsy or

removal of a lesion or growth, the procedure is considered diagnostic and the deductible is applied. If the flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy is done in a hospital outpatient department or ambulatory surgical center, the patient pays 25% of the Medicare-approved amount.

Medicare Pays for Colorectal Screening Tests to Help You Stay Healthy

Take as little as 30-minutes to get screened for colon cancer. It can save your life. “Colorectal cancer often has no symptoms,” says Charlotte Yeh, MD, Administrator for the Northeast Regions of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). “That is why it is so important for people age 50 and older to be screened.” Getting screened for colorectal cancer is one of the smartest things you can do for your health. If you have part B, Medicare covers colorectal cancer screenings for all people with Medicare ages 50 or older.

Find colorectal cancer early, when treatment works best, through routine screening. “Screening can find abnormal growths in the colon or rectum so that they can be removed before turning into cancer,” says Dr. Yeh. There are several tests for colorectal cancer. Talk to your physician about the one that is best for you.

Don’t overlook routine preventive services like colorectal screening tests. Preventive services are critical to your overall health and can help you prevent diseases or find them early, when treatment works best.

To help you remember the services you received and the tests you need each year, visit the MyMedicare.gov web tool. By visiting MyMedicare.gov on the web, you can see a description of your covered preventive services, the last date that service was performed, and the next date you are eligible for that service. If you don’t have a computer, ask a family member or loved one if they do. Or, your local library or senior center may be able to help you look at this information.

Start taking steps toward prevention today. These three easy steps can put you on the road to better health:

- ✓ STEP 1: Know your health history
- ✓ STEP 2: Talk to your doctor about the Medicare preventive services that are right for you
- ✓ STEP 3: Register at MyMedicare.gov on any computer connected to the Internet