



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Don't Pass on this Test

Use of Colorectal Cancer Tests — United States, 2002, 2004, and 2006

Recorded: March 25, 2008; posted: March 27, 2008

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Colonoscopy. It's often the subject of jokes, and bringing it up is usually a sure-fire way to kill a party. But this potentially life-saving procedure is no laughing matter, and middle-aged adults who ignore the topic put themselves at risk. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. A recent CDC study indicated that, in 2004, nearly 150,000 Americans were diagnosed with colon cancer and over 53,000 died. But like most cancers, colorectal cancer is most treatable if caught early.

Dr. Djenaba Joseph is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of being tested regularly for colorectal cancer. Welcome to the show, Djenaba.

[Dr. Joseph] Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Has colorectal cancer always been one of the more commonly diagnosed cancers?

[Dr. Joseph] Yes, as you mentioned, colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among men and women.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there warning signs of the potential onset of this disease?

[Dr. Joseph] Yes, there are some warning signs, including a change in bowel habits, blood in the stool, vague abdominal pain, stools that are skinnier than usual. Most of these signs actually come fairly late in the disease, so it's better to be tested *early* —before you have symptoms — so you can find the disease when it's most easily treated.

[Dr. Gaynes] What tests are available to determine if a person has colorectal cancer?

[Dr. Joseph] There are actually two types of screening tests. One type that tests your stool for blood, and the other type is what we call endoscopy, where they take a small scope and look inside your colon.

[Dr. Gaynes] When and how often should a person be tested?

[Dr. Joseph] Most adults should be tested starting at the age of 50, which is when the risk of colon cancer starts to increase. However, when and how often you should be tested depends on

whether you or anyone in your family has a history of colon cancer or a history of polyps or growths in the colon. So, you need to talk to with your doctor about when, exactly, you should start testing and how often you should be tested.

[Dr. Gaynes] Will insurance cover the costs of these tests, and do you have any suggestions for screening if one does not have insurance coverage?

[Dr. Joseph] Most insurances do cover the cost of these tests but, of course, that varies, depending on what kind of insurance coverage you have. If you don't have insurance or you have insurance that doesn't cover these tests, CDC actually has a demonstration program where they are providing colorectal cancer screening in five states in the country. If you're not in one of those states, then your options are to contact the American Cancer Society or your local state health department for more information.

[Dr. Gaynes] With this particular type of cancer, how important is an early diagnosis?

[Dr. Joseph] It's very important that you get screened early because not only can you prevent cancer from developing by removing a polyp or growth before it turns into cancer, if you do have cancer, removing it early significantly improves your chances that the disease can be cured.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can our listeners get more information about colorectal cancer?

[Dr. Joseph] You can get more information at CDC's website: www.cdc.gov/cancer.

[Dr. Gaynes] Djenaba, thank you for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Joseph] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, that's all for this week's show. Be sure and join us again next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.