More Alaska Native people are getting screened for colorectal cancer than ever before, meaning fewer of our people and families are suffering because of this devastating disease. This is great news considering that cancer remains the leading cause of death among Alaska Native people, and colorectal cancer is the leading cause of new cases of cancer for our people. We are getting healthier because our people around the state now have increased access to health screenings, and are receiving more education and outreach focused on colorectal cancer prevention.

Colorectal cancer is a cancer that grows slowly in the large intestine (colon) and rectum, but it is also preventable and treatable. Early colorectal cancer has no symptoms, which is why screenings are so important. Screenings help discover pre-cancerous growths, which can be easily removed. Colorectal cancer is very treatable when found at an early stage.

Therefore, all men and women older than 50 should be screened for colorectal cancer; earlier if there is a family history of the disease. Colorectal cancer is twice as common if you have a parent, sibling or child who has had colorectal cancer, so you should let your provider know if you have a family history of the disease. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) recommends that Alaska Native people start receiving screenings at age 40. There are several screening options available, so it is important to talk with your provider about which screening test is right for you.

Although our people have made great progress in colorectal cancer screening and prevention, more work remains to stop this disease. In fact, the rates of new cases of cancer and deaths due to this disease are twice as high among Alaska Native people as U.S. whites.

Let’s learn about colorectal cancer, talk to our family and friends about it, and meet with our providers to decide when and what screenings are right for us. Those are healthy, and possibly lifesaving, conversations we all can have that will make our people healthier.
Jake Martus is a Patient Navigator with ANTHC’s Alaska Native Epidemiology Center and Colorectal Cancer Screening Clinic. His job is to reach out to the first degree family members of colorectal cancer patients and encourage them to come in for screenings. This work is critical because colorectal cancer is twice as common if you have a first degree family member (biological parent, sibling or child) who has had colorectal cancer.

“Each day it’s a different situation,” said Martus. “When I contact the family members, I try to educate them about colorectal cancer facts and that Alaska Native people have one of the highest rates of colon cancer. I also share with them how preventable it is and how a healthy lifestyle can help slow the growth of polyps in your colon.”

When you go in for a colonoscopy, the doctors are looking for polyps, or little bits of tissue that have grown on the wall of your colon. These polyps can sometimes become cancerous. But when caught early through a colonoscopy, they are easily removable and help you remain cancer free.

“Many people tell me that they feel fine and they don’t need the screening, but with colon cancer you never know,” said Martus. “Most people might never show symptoms until the cancer has grown. The best way to prevent colorectal cancer is by getting screened.”

LEARN MORE

For more information about colorectal cancer prevention and treatment, visit or contact the following:

ANTHC Colorectal Cancer Screening Patient Navigators
(907) 729-4444
ANTHC Alaska Native Epidemiology Center
www.anthctoday.org/epicenter/colon.html
Colon Cancer Alliance:
www.ccalliance.org
American Cancer Society:
www.cancer.org/cancer/colonandrectumcancer/index

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT COLORECTAL CANCER:

A. Quit smoking and/or using other forms of tobacco, including chew and iq’mik.
B. Exercise regularly: Physical activity can reduce your risk of colorectal cancer by as much as 50%!
C. Get screened.
D. Eat well and keep a healthy weight. Discuss what’s best for you with your provider.
E. Limit Alcohol Consumption: Drink more water.
Canned Fruit
Cocktail
Fresh Fruit or Wild Berries
Potato Chips
Orange Juice

There are hidden sugars everywhere in food, especially in already prepared foods such as ketchup, peanut butter, canned fruits and vegetables, and low-fat products, which replace sugar for fat content. Whenever possible, choose to eat whole and traditional foods that are natural and not processed — whole foods are foods in their truest form and do not contain added sugar, salt, carbohydrates, fats or preservatives that many processed foods do.

COLONOSCOPY
Provider and patient determine when testing should start

ARE YOU: 40–75 years old?

Maintain a healthy lifestyle to prevent CRC. Encourage friends and family to get screened.

Provider and patient decide which test is preferred

**Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)**
- Reduces death from CRC
- Safe, available, easy to complete
- Done on your own at home
- Finds cancer early by finding blood in stool
- Finds most cancers early when done every year

**Flexible Sigmoidoscopy**
- Reduces death from CRC
- Can prevent cancer by removing polyps (or abnormal growths in the colon) during test
- Examines half of the colon
- Finds pre-cancerous polyps. If polyps are found, a colonoscopy will be recommended
- Done every five years if no polyps are found

**Colonoscopy**
- Reduces death from CRC
- Can prevent cancer by removing polyps (or abnormal growths in the colon) during test
- Examines entire colon
- Finds and removes most cancers or polyps that are present at the time of the test
- Done every 10 years if no polyps are found