

**For Immediate Release**  
**September 24, 2012**



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## **THE FACTS HISPANICS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLON CANCER**

**OAK BROOK, Ill. - September 24, 2012** - Each year more than 140,000 people in the United States are diagnosed with colon cancer and approximately 50,000 will die from the disease. All men and women are at risk for colon cancer. However, because of disproportionate screening rates, minorities, including Hispanics, are more likely to be diagnosed with colon cancer in advanced stages. Survival rates after diagnosis are also lower for Hispanics and this may be due to less access to timely and high-quality treatment. The American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE), representing the specialists in colon cancer screening, advises Hispanics to speak to their doctors about getting screened for colon cancer.

“There is a myth in the Hispanic community that colon cancer is a man’s disease. Colon cancer does not discriminate against gender or race. It is a largely preventable disease. Colonoscopy screening can detect polyps and remove them before they turn into cancer,” said Marta L. Davila, MD, FASGE, American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy. “I encourage all Hispanics age 50 and over to speak with their doctor about colon cancer screening. If you have a family history of the disease, you may need to begin screening before age 50.”

According to statistics from the American Cancer Society, colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Hispanic men and the third leading cause of cancer deaths among women. Between 2000 and 2009, death rates for colon cancer decreased by about two percent per year among Hispanics and by three percent per year among non-Hispanics. Both men and women should undergo testing for the disease starting at age 50. Most insurance covers screening at age 50. If you are 65 or older, screening is covered by Medicare. For many people, a referral is not required.

### **About Colon Cancer and Prevention**

The majority of colorectal cancers, also referred to as colon cancer, arise from precancerous growths in the colon called polyps. Colon cancer is considered a silent killer because often there are no symptoms until it is too late to cure. Age is the single most important risk factor for the disease, so even people who lead a healthy lifestyle can still develop polyps and cancer. Both men and women are affected by colon cancer equally. It is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. for men and women combined. Colon cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in Hispanic Americans.

The ASGE recommends screening begin at age 50; sooner if there is a family history of polyps, colon cancer or other risk factors. When people are diagnosed with colon cancer at an early stage, the five-year survival rate is 90 percent, which is why screening for prevention and early detection is so important.

A 2011 CDC report says that rates of new cases and deaths from colon cancer are decreasing and more adults are being screened; however, one in three adults of screening age are not being screened. Colon cancer still takes the lives of approximately 50,000 people a year in the United States. Colonoscopy is considered the preferred screening test because it is a preventive exam: it is the only test that both finds and removes precancerous polyps during the same exam. With other screening methods, if a polyp is found, that test must then be followed by a colonoscopy to remove the polyp. Patients should speak with their doctor about the screening option that is best for them and at what age to begin screening. Learn more about colonoscopy in this ASGE video: [What to expect before, during and after a colonoscopy](#).

### **Colon Cancer Symptoms**

Colon cancer is often present in people without symptoms, but the following signs or symptoms might indicate colon cancer: blood in stools, narrower than normal stools, unexplained abdominal pain, unexplained change in bowel habits, unexplained anemia, and unexplained weight loss. These symptoms may be caused by other benign diseases such as hemorrhoids, inflammation in the colon or irritable bowel syndrome. The presence of these symptoms for more than a few days is an indication to talk with a gastrointestinal specialist about these symptoms and the patient's family history.

### **Language Barriers**

Studies have shown that language is a barrier in regards to racial discrepancies and colon cancer screening. ASGE offers patient education brochures in Spanish for doctors to order at [www.asge.org](http://www.asge.org). The Society also offers a colon cancer awareness website, [www.screen4coloncancer.org](http://www.screen4coloncancer.org), which has content in English, Spanish and Chinese, including Spanish-language patient education videos and Public Service Announcements: <http://www.screen4coloncancer.org/videos.asp>

### **Here are a few important facts Hispanics need to know about colon cancer:**

- Hispanic Americans are less likely to get screened for colon cancer than either non-Hispanic Caucasians or African Americans. Starting at age 50, all men and women should begin having colon cancer screening tests.
- Some people are at higher risk for the disease because of age, lifestyle or personal and family medical history. However, colon cancer affects men and women alike.
- Tell your health care professional if you have a personal or family history of colon cancer, colorectal polyps or inflammatory bowel disease. Then ask which test you should have and when you should begin colon cancer screening.
- There are many obstacles to colon cancer screening, including reluctance to talk about colon cancer and embarrassment about having procedures involving tests that require stool samples.

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### **About the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy**

Since its founding in 1941, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) has been dedicated to advancing patient care and digestive health by promoting excellence and innovation in gastrointestinal endoscopy. ASGE, with more than 12,000 members worldwide, promotes the highest standards for endoscopic training and practice, fosters endoscopic research, recognizes distinguished contributions to endoscopy, and is the foremost resource for endoscopic education. Visit [www.asge.org](http://www.asge.org) and [www.screen4coloncancer.org](http://www.screen4coloncancer.org) for more information and to find a qualified doctor in your area.

### **About Endoscopy**

Endoscopy is performed by specially-trained physicians called endoscopists using the most current

technology to diagnose and treat diseases of the gastrointestinal tract. Using flexible, thin tubes called endoscopes, endoscopists are able to access the human digestive tract without incisions via natural orifices. Endoscopes are designed with high-intensity lighting and fitted with precision devices that allow viewing and treatment of the gastrointestinal system.