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For Immediate Release

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Colorectal Cancer: Preventable, Beatable and Treatable

“Colorectal cancer is preventable, beatable and treatable when it’s caught early. It’s important for men and women to follow recommendations from the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program and begin screening for colorectal cancer at age 50,” said Dorrann Hultman, a public health nurse with South Heartland District Health Department. “While some groups recommend starting earlier, at age 45, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the vast majority of new cases of colorectal cancer (about 90%) occur in people who are age 50 or older”.

“Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths in men and women in the United States according to the American Cancer Society,” said Michele Bever, health director for the South Heartland District Health Department. “Colorectal cancer is expected to cause over 51,000 deaths during 2019.”

“While the rate of colorectal cancer in the South Heartland District of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, is lower than the Nebraska rate, that isn’t the case for the mortality or death rate from this cancer,” says Bever. “The South Heartland District has a higher mortality rate than the overall Nebraska rate.”

Hultman says the South Heartland Cancer Coalition, a group of partners, community members and cancer survivors who are committed to reducing cancer across the district, is working hard to provide community education and promote colorectal cancer screening this spring.

The coalition’s message is that all men and women age 50 and over need screened for colorectal cancer. Evidence shows that regular colorectal screening reduces death from colorectal cancer because testing can find precancerous growths called polyps. These polyps can be removed before they turn into cancer.

Colorectal polyps and colorectal cancer don’t always have symptoms. However, things like blood in or on your stool, stomach pain, aches, cramps that don’t go away or losing weight without knowing why may indicate problems with the colon and should be checked by your health care provider.

There are several test options for colorectal cancer screening. There are stool-based tests and there are visual exams of the colon and rectum.

The stool-based tests include:

- Highly sensitive fecal occult blood test (FOBT) which checks for hidden blood in three consecutive stool samples. This test is completed at home and sent to a doctor or lab for results. It should be completed each year.
- Highly sensitive fecal immunochemical test (FIT) uses antibodies to detect blood in the stool. It should be done every year in the same way as the FOBT.
- The FIT-DNA test (stool DNA test) combines FIT with a test that detects altered DNA in the stool. For this test you collect an entire bowel movement and send it to a lab where it is checked for cancer cells. It should be done every one to three years.

The visual exams of the colon and rectum include:

- Flexible sigmoidoscopy is a test where a doctor puts a flexible, lighted tube into the rectum to check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the lower third of the colon. This test is done every five years.
- Colonoscopy is a test where a doctor uses a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube to check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the entire colon. This test is done every 10 years.
Colonoscopies are also used as a follow up test if anything unusual is found on any of the other screening tests.
- CT Colonography (virtual colonoscopy) is a test that uses x-rays and computers to produce images of the entire colon on a computer screen for the doctor to analyze.

Are you wondering which test is best for you? Hultman says, “That decision is up to you. The best test is the one that gets done! So talk with your medical provider about the benefits and risks of each screening option as well as your family history, personal risk factors and preferences to help determine which screening test is best for you.”

According to South Heartland’s health director, Dr. Michele Bever, “the health department has a goal to increase the number of South Heartland adults age 50 and older who are up-to-date on their colorectal cancer screening because we know screening saves lives.”

“Most insurance plans, including Medicare, help pay for colorectal cancer screening,” Bever said. “So, check with your health insurance provider to learn more about your colorectal cancer screening benefits.”

The health department offers free FOBT kits to complete at home. To get your FREE screening kit, stop by the South Heartland District Health Department at 606 N. Minnesota, Suite 2, Hastings, NE, or call the health department at 402-462-6211 (toll free at 1-877-238-7595). Kits are also available in pharmacies in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties, and at area health fairs.

More information can be found at the South Heartland District Health Department website, www.southheartlandhealth.org, or on this colorectal cancer screening fact sheet: http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Documents/ColonCancer_ENG.pdf.

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