

# The screening test every adult over 45 needs

By Maddie du Pont

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, but the good news is it's highly preventable with regular screening. Screening helps catch this cancer early, when it's easier to treat or even before it develops. If you're age 45 or older, or if you have a family history of colorectal cancer, it's time to talk to your doctor about screening. Here's why it's so important and how you can take action to protect your health.

**Why screen for colorectal cancer?** Colorectal cancer starts in the colon or rectum, often beginning as small, harmless growths called polyps. These polyps can develop into cancer over time. Screening tests can detect polyps and allow doctors to remove them before they turn into cancer. Early detection also means better treatment outcomes. Unfortunately, colorectal cancer often has no symptoms in its early stages. By the time symptoms like blood in your stool, abdominal pain, or unexplained weight loss appear, the cancer may already be advanced. That's why screening is critical, even if you feel perfectly healthy.

**Who should be screened?** The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that all adults start regular screening for colorectal cancer at age 45 and continue until 75 years old. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer or polyps, or if you have certain conditions like inflammatory bowel disease, you may need to start even earlier.

There are multiple ways to screen, including:

- 1. Stool-based tests:** which are offered at RiverStone Health clinics and other family medicine clinics locally, check for DNA changes in your stool and can be easily sent through the mail from the comfort of your own home.
- 2. Colonoscopy:** examines the inside of your colon and rectum using a small camera. This test allows concerning polyps to be removed on the spot. If your first colonoscopy is normal, you may not need another one for 10 more years.

Your doctor can help you decide which test is best for you based on your age, health and risk factors.

**What's stopping you?** Some people hesitate to get screened because screening can be uncomfortable, aren't sure if it's necessary, or don't think they can afford it. The truth is that screening saves lives. Studies show that colorectal cancer screening reduces deaths caused by colorectal cancer by 50%.

Colorectal screening is covered by most health insurances including Medicaid. For RiverStone Health patients who are uninsured or underinsured, we may be able to cover the cost of screenings.

**Take the first step:** Ask family members if anyone related to you has had colon cancer. If you're 45 or older or have a family history, don't wait to schedule an appointment with your provider. Remember, colorectal cancer is preventable and treatable when caught early. Your health is worth it. Take that first

step and get screened.

For more information or to schedule your screening, contact your health care provider. If you don't have one yet, consider establishing care with a trusted family physician at RiverStone Health Clinic.

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