

For Immediate Release
March 2, 2010

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March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer can strike at any age, but nine out of 10 new cases are in people age 50 or older. Kansans older than 50 or who have a family history of the disease are encouraged to be screened.

“Colorectal cancer is unique in the medical world -- it can actually be prevented if detected early, before cancerous polyps have a chance to grow and spread,” said Roderick L. Bremby, Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). “When found early, the treatment of colorectal cancer can be very effective.”

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer of Kansans and represents more than 11 percent of all newly diagnosed cancers in the state. From 2002 – 2006, a total of 7,244 Kansans were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 2,719 died. Nationally, more than 145,000 new cases of colon cancer are diagnosed and more than 55,000 die of the disease each year.

Due to increased screening and early detection, the Kansas colorectal cancer mortality rate from 1999 to 2008 decreased by more than 20 percent. While screening rates are increasing nationwide, studies show screening rates are lower among racial and ethnic minorities compared to whites, and among those without health insurance, with low income, and with less than a high school education.

“Screening rates in Kansas also remain significantly lower than national rates,” said Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, State Health Officer and Director of Health for KDHE. “Kansas death data from 2004 to 2008 also show that compared to whites, African-Americans are disproportionately affected by the disease.”

Additionally, Friday, March 5 is the 2nd Annual National Dress in Blue Day. Dress in Blue Day is a national effort through the Colon Cancer Alliance that is designed to encourage individuals, businesses and community groups to wear blue and talk to each other about the importance of colon cancer screening.

For more information about colorectal cancer, Kansas cancer resources and information, visit www.cancerkansas.org.

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As the state's environmental protection and public health agency, KDHE promotes responsible choices to protect the health and environment for all Kansans.

Through education, direct services and the assessment of data and trends, coupled with policy development and enforcement, KDHE will improve health and quality of life. We prevent illness, injuries and foster a safe and sustainable environment for the people of Kansas.