

## **March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month**

If you could prevent cancer, would you do it? Would it have to be easy and effective? If you answered yes to both of these questions, you can do something. You can get screened for colorectal cancer to help find precancerous polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in Kansas and the United States. But it doesn't have to be. This is one cancer you can prevent. March is colorectal cancer awareness month, a time to learn more about this type of cancer and what you can do.

Here is what you need to know:

- If you are over age 50, see your doctor to get screened. For those with a family history of the disease screening should begin earlier.
- Colorectal cancer and precancerous polyps don't always cause symptoms.
- Colorectal cancer affects both men and women equally.
- When found early, colorectal cancer treatment can be very effective.
- Many insurance plans, including the State policies and Medicare, help pay for colorectal cancer screening.

Colorectal cancer represents 12 percent of all newly diagnosed invasive cancers in Kansas. From 2000 to 2004, 7,361 Kansans were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 2,744 died of the disease. Survival from colorectal cancer depends on the stage of the disease at the time of diagnosis.

KDHE will be promoting Colorectal Cancer Awareness month and the "Screen for Life" campaign through a number of public information activities. Public service announcements for radio and television featuring such stars as Katie Couric, Jimmy Smits, Morgan Freeman and Diane Keaton have been sent to stations across the state. In addition, news releases and letters to the editor have been sent to Kansas newspapers.

Both men and women should follow one of the testing guidelines set out by the American Cancer Society and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force to check for colorectal cancer. This includes a fecal occult blood test, colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy depending on factors such as your age, personal history and other health factors.

These screening tests can often detect polyps or small growths in the lining of the rectum and colon, which can be removed before cancer even develops. If cancer is detected while still localized in the bowel, 90 percent of patients can expect to be alive five years later. Prompt treatment and care can prolong life- making a cancer patient, a cancer survivor.