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Cancer Screening & COVID-19

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, many people stopped getting their regular cancer screenings. At first, this was because most elective medical procedures (including many cancer screenings) were put on hold to prioritize urgent medical needs and reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in health care settings. But even after cancer screenings began to be offered again, many people were understandably concerned about going to a health care facility unless they really needed to.

- [Regular cancer screening is very important](#)
- [Options for cancer screening](#)
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While cancer screening rates have improved since then, doctors are concerned that the screenings that were missed or delayed at the start of the pandemic will lead to more cancers being diagnosed when they are more advanced and harder to treat.

Regular cancer screening is very important

Regular screening can often help find cancer at an earlier stage, when it's likely to be easier to treat. The American Cancer Society has screening recommendations for several types of cancer, including breast, colorectal, cervical, lung, and prostate cancer. See [Find Cancer Early](#)¹ to learn more about our cancer screening guidelines.

If your cancer screening schedule was disrupted in the past few years for any reason, talk to your health care provider about getting back on schedule. Your provider can discuss balancing the risks and benefits of being screened, taking into account your personal and family history, other risk factors, and the timing of your last screening test.

It's important to know that cancer *screening* tests look for cancer in people who don't

have symptoms. These tests are different from tests your doctor might order if you have symptoms that could be from cancer. **If you have signs or symptoms that might be from cancer, such as a lump in the breast or blood in the stool, contact your health care provider. Do not put off getting medical care if you have signs or symptoms that might be from cancer.**

Options for cancer screening

Health care facilities that offer cancer screening tests have many safety precautions in place to help protect you and others. Still, some people might be concerned about going to a facility for screening at this time. Some people might also face delays in scheduling certain tests because many health care facilities are still catching up from screenings that were missed at the start of the pandemic.

Talk to your health care provider about options to help get you on schedule (or back on schedule) for your screening tests. For some types of cancer screening, you might have some flexibility, either in the tests you have or how often you have them. For example, not every type of test needs to be done every year, and some tests can be done at home.

- Many women get [cervical cancer screening](#)² every year. However, cervical cancer screening with a Pap test isn't recommended any more often than every 3 years, and if an HPV test is used, no more often than every 5 years. If you have had normal test results in the past, talk to your provider about when you should be screened again.
- Many women get an annual mammogram for [breast cancer screening](#)³. However, many leading organizations that issue screening guidelines recommend that women at average risk, especially those ages 55 and older, can choose to be screened every two years.
- There are several options for [colorectal cancer screening](#)⁴ for people at average risk. For example, stool tests such as fecal immunochemical testing (FIT) or a stool DNA test (such as Cologuard) can be done at home, although if the stool test result is abnormal (positive), you will need a colonoscopy. Colonoscopy is also an option as a screening test, but some facilities may be scheduling colonoscopies further in advance than in the past.
- [Prostate cancer screening](#)⁵ with the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test is an option starting at age 50 for men at average risk (and earlier for those at higher risk). Men should have a chance to make an informed decision about whether to be screened, after getting information from their health care provider about the

uncertainties, risks, and potential benefits of screening.

See [Get Screened](#)⁶ to learn more about the American Cancer Society's screening guidelines and about screening options.

Talk to your health care provider

Decisions about getting screened for cancer depend on many factors, and they may not be the same for everyone. It's important to know about your risk for certain cancers and to think carefully about the benefits and possible risks of screening for you. Your health care provider can help you determine which screening tests might be best for you at this time.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/cervical-cancer-screening-guidelines.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/screening-tests-and-early-detection/american-cancer-society-recommendations-for-the-early-detection-of-breast-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/colon-rectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/acs-recommendations.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/acs-recommendations.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/get-screened.html

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