

VCU Community Memorial Hospital is a Commission on Cancer (CoC) accredited facility that provides quality cancer care to South Central Virginia including residents of Mecklenburg, Lunenburg, Brunswick, Greensville, Charlotte, and Nottoway Counties.

The latest data from the American Cancer Society (ACS) shows that, excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the United States. The ACS estimates that in 2019 there will be 101,420 new cases of colon cancer and 44,180 cases of rectal cancer. Additionally, colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths for both men and women in the US. It is estimated that there will be around 51,000 deaths in 2019 from colorectal cancer. The lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is about 1 in 22 for men and 1 in 24 for women.

Despite being one of the most common malignancies in the US, it is also one of the most preventable. Through the use of screening technology (and other factors such as dietary changes), the incidence of colorectal cancer has been decreasing. Screening can prevent cancer by detecting and removing precancerous growths before they become invasive cancer. Additionally, screening can detect cancer at an early stage, when treatment is usually more successful. Screening is recommended beginning at age 50 for people at average risk, but earlier for people at increased risk due to family history or other medical conditions.

Colorectal cancer is one of the Top 5 cancers treated at VCU-Community Memorial Hospital. VCU-CMH provided treatment to 29 patients with colorectal cancer in 2017, and 22 patients in 2018. VCU-CMH participate in many of the prevention and screening programs the American Cancer Society recommends. In 2019, over 49 people participated in the various educational and screening events that were held throughout the service area. At these events education was provided to the public as well as a question and answer session. VCU-CMH also provided risk screenings and a take home hemoccult tests for the people who were eligible who had not already received a screening colonoscopy.

Although, the incidence rate of colorectal cancer is decreasing due to better detection through screening, the rate of incidence in people under the age of 50 is increasing. Therefore it is important to contact your doctor if you experience unusual symptoms, regardless of your age. The following information, provided by the American Cancer Society, details the symptoms of possible colon cancer. Please contact your primary care physician to determine if a screening colonoscopy is recommended for you.

What are the symptoms of colorectal cancer?

Early CRC often has no symptoms, which is why screening is so important. As a tumor grows, it may bleed or obstruct the intestine. In some cases, blood loss from the cancer leads to anemia (low number of red blood cells), causing symptoms such as weakness, excessive fatigue, and sometimes shortness of breath. Additional warning signs include:

- Bleeding from the rectum
- Blood in the stool or in the toilet after having a bowel movement
- Dark or black stools
- A change in bowel habits or the shape of the stool (e.g., more narrow than usual)
- Cramping or discomfort in the lower abdomen
- An urge to have a bowel movement when the bowel is empty
- Constipation or diarrhea that lasts for more than a few days
- Decreased appetite
- Unintentional weight loss