



News Release

KENNETH W. JENKINS, Westchester County Executive

Date: March 5, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Catherine Cioffi

Communications Director

Office - (914) 995-2932

Cell- (914) 954 -5579

CCioffi@westchestercountyny.gov

MARCH IS COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING AWARENESS MONTH

Learn More About Colorectal Cancer and Get Connected to Free and Affordable Screenings

Watch the News Conference Here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9h82cCw6vM>

(White Plains) – Westchester County is partnering with hospitals and health systems Countywide for Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Westchester County Health Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler said March is a time to raise awareness about colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, and to get checked if you are over 40 or earlier, depending on family and personal history.

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins said: “Colorectal cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in men under 50 and the second leading cause of cancer death in women under 50. Each year, more young men and women in their 30s and 40s are diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Screening saves lives.”

Amler said: “If you are in your forties, it’s time to discuss your family history, identify your risk factors and learn ways to reduce risks through lifestyle changes and regular screening. For most of us, screening should start at age 45, but if your parent or sibling was diagnosed with polyps or colorectal cancer, screening should begin even earlier.”

In addition to regular colonoscopies, the Health Department emphasizes that over half of all colorectal cancers are linked to lifestyle factors, including physical inactivity, poor nutrition, excess body weight, and tobacco and alcohol use. Protect your health by maintaining a healthy weight, staying active, and incorporating more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains into your diet. Steer clear of tobacco, and try to limit or avoid red and processed meats, sugary drinks, refined grains, and alcohol.

This month, the County Health Department will begin connecting patients who are eligible for colorectal cancer screenings with affordable options.

Regional Chief of Colon and Rectal Surgery for Westchester Northwell Health Dr. Parul J. Shukla said: “Colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cancer in our country. We have effective screening tests to identify these cancers as well as identifying pre-cancerous polyps. By identifying these pre-cancerous polyps and removing them by colonoscopy, cancers can be prevented. The recommended age to start screening for colorectal cancer is 45 years, unless there is a family history of colorectal cancer, in which case it should be done sooner. Please get screened and also encourage your family and friends to do so. Prevent a cancer from developing, thereby potentially saving a life”.

Associate Professor and Cancer Epidemiologist with the Department of Occupational Medicine, Epidemiology and Prevention, Northwell Health Cancer Institute Dr. Christine Molmenti said: “There are several methods of screening, but a colonoscopy, where precancerous polyps are detected and removed, is the only screening test that both prevents cancer and detects cancer early so it can be treated. While age 45 is when most people should have a first colonoscopy, as an increasing number of younger patients are developing colorectal cancer, so anyone with a family history of colorectal cancer or an advanced polyp should start at age 40, or sooner.”

Regional Director of the Cancer Services Program of the Hudson Valley Sara Hodgdon said: “The collaborative effort across Westchester County to increase colorectal cancer screening demonstrates our shared commitment to saving lives through early detection. Open Door and Sun River are proud to work alongside our partners at the Department of Health, Northwell Health, and other healthcare providers, through our Cancer Services Program, ensuring that every member of our community has access to these vital preventive services.”

Medical Director, St. Joseph’s Family Health Center in Yonkers DO David Jerome said: “St. Joseph’s Medical Center in Yonkers provides essential colorectal cancer screenings, helping to detect potential issues early and reduce the risk of developing advanced stages of the disease. Early detection through screening is key in preventing colorectal cancer or catching it at an earlier, more treatable stage, significantly improving outcomes and survival rates. We are excited to partner with Westchester County in this initiative to increase the number of screenings for colorectal cancer and the impact it will have on the Yonkers community.”

Associate Professor of Medicine, Medical Director of Endoscopy, Westchester Medical Center/New York Medical College Dr. Shireen Pais said: “Whether you’re insured or not, you can easily access our colonoscopy services by scheduling an appointment through our website or by calling our office directly at 914-533-4111. We offer flexible payment options and work with a variety of insurance providers to ensure the process is as smooth as possible. Our team is here to help guide you through your options and answer any questions you may have.”

Senior Director, Ambulatory Quality and Safety, White Plains Physician Services, White Plains Hospital Dr. Gregory Pontone said: “Colorectal cancer is highly preventable, treatable, and most importantly, beatable, but early detection is crucial. With cases rising in adults under 50, it’s more important than ever to prioritize screening, as early-stage colorectal cancer often has no symptoms. Speak to your physician about when to get a colonoscopy and don’t ignore warning signs like changes in bowel habits, rectal bleeding, or persistent abdominal discomfort. A balanced diet, regular exercise and maintaining a healthy body weight can all play a role in lowering your individual risk.”

Medical Director for the St. John’s Medical Group Dr. Ashok Chopra said: “Colorectal cancer screening can save lives by detecting pre-cancerous polyps and early-stage cancers, ultimately reducing mortality through timely treatment and cures. St. John’s Riverside Hospital offers a comprehensive educational program during March and throughout the year, providing valuable information on prevention and treatment options. The St. John’s Medical Group is advancing care in Westchester County with three GI practices including one focused

on women's health and an advanced endoscopic practice. All our medical providers are available to see patients and discuss both screening and treatment options."

Chief Medical Officer of NewYork-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital and Vice President and Regional Executive Medical Director of NewYork-Presbyterian Medical Group in Hudson Valley and Westchester Dr. William J. Higgins said: "Colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, and timely screenings can make all the difference. Colonoscopies save lives. It's important to know your family history, and don't wait for symptoms to appear. Prioritize your health by getting screened. We are pleased to work with Westchester County to help raise awareness about the critical importance of screening."

Associate Director of Clinical Affairs, Montefiore Einstein Comprehensive Cancer Center Shalom Kalnicki, MD, FASTRO, FACR, FACRO said: "Our comprehensive suite of screening methods, including colonoscopies, enable us to prevent and treat cancer in the most reliable, and time efficient ways. This March, Westchester residents will benefit from our expanded services as well as our research on inherited forms of colorectal cancer and this disease's impact on younger populations. We couldn't be prouder to offer this academic care directly to our community."

According to the American Cancer Society racial and ethnic background also is a factor. Blacks have the second-highest rates of colorectal cancer and are most likely to be diagnosed later. Ashkenazi Jews have one of the highest colorectal cancer risks of any ethnic group in the world. Other risk factors include a family history of colorectal cancer or polyps, or a personal history of polyps, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, Type 2 diabetes and inherited genetic conditions.

Some screening tests can be done at home, are low-cost and require no prep or sedation, but must be performed every one to three years and may require a follow up colonoscopy. A colonoscopy can be performed every 10 years for those with no risk factors, but requires preparation and sedation in a medical office or health center.

Residents who are uninsured or underinsured can call the Cancer Services Program of the Hudson Valley at 914-488-6400 for information and referral to free cancer screenings (colorectal, breast and cervical) and diagnostic testing at health centers throughout the County.

There are a number of events throughout Westchester County to mark Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month:

- **Tuesday, March 4, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital**, in the lobby at 12 N. 7th Ave, Mount Vernon. Nurses and patient navigators will provide information about colorectal cancer screening options, schedule appointments and more. For more information, call the Colorectal Cancer Screening Program at 718-920-7183 or 347-671-8208.
- **Thursday, March 13, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., St. John's Riverside Hospital**, Andrus Pavilion, Garden Room B, Level S2, 967 N Broadway, Yonkers. Colorectal cancer experts will provide information about colorectal cancer risks and screening options, and an inflatable colon will be present as a visual aid.
- **Thursday, March 13, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Phelps Hospital**, 701 North Broadway, Sleepy Hollow, Auditorium. Early Onset Colorectal Cancer Symposium for health care providers.
- **Wednesday, March 19, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. White Plains Hospital's Center for Advanced Medicine & Surgery Lobby**, 122 Maple Avenue, White Plains. Colorectal cancer experts will provide information about colorectal cancer risks, screening options, the importance of colonoscopies and connections to specialists. For more information, call Cancer Center Navigator Sandra Negron at 914-849-7656.
- **Tuesday, March 25, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at New Rochelle Hospital** Ambulatory Surgery Building, 23 Washington Ave., Building #31, New Rochelle. New and existing patients can walk through the Rollin' Colon, a 20-foot-long, 12-foot-high, 10-foot-wide pink inflatable reproduction of the human colon to

learn more about the signs and symptoms colorectal cancer, the types of screening available and obtain resources and literature; other cancer prevention information also available. For more information, call the Colorectal Cancer Screening Program at 718-920-7183 or 347-671-8208.

For more health tips and cancer resources, go to www.westchestergov.com/health. The health department can be reached at (914) 813-5000.

###