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Screening and Lifestyle Choices Can Lower Colorectal Cancer Risk

Brewster, NY – Colorectal cancer – cancer that begins in the colon or rectum – is one of the most common cancers among New Yorkers. Each year more than 10,000 people develop colorectal cancer, and nearly 3,500 die in New York State alone. Early detection is key and March, National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, is a good time to schedule a screening and make some lifestyle changes for further protection.

“Screenings for colorectal cancer can detect polyps before cancer even begins,” says Allen Beals, M.D., Putnam County Commissioner of Health. “If polyps are found early, they can be removed easily.”

“It is always smart to take the initiative when it concerns matters of health,” said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “I am so pleased to see that our Health Department is proactive in seeing to it that information on a variety of health matters is brought to the attention of the public.”

Colorectal cancer can strike younger adults, but most cases are in people aged 50 or older. According to the Centers for Disease Control, if everyone 50 years and older were screened regularly, nearly 60% of deaths from this cancer could be avoided. Certain individuals should begin testing earlier, such as those with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, inflammatory bowel disease or colorectal polyps. These conditions may put them at greater risk. Recommended screening tests include: stool tests, colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy or a barium enema.

Colorectal polyps and colorectal cancer do not always cause symptoms, especially in the early stages. Symptoms for colorectal cancer typically do not surface until it has spread and become life threatening. Symptoms may include bleeding from the rectum, blood in the stool, change in bowel habits, decreased appetite or unexplained weight loss, weakness and fatigue, or stomach pain that does not go away, and should prompt a call to your health care provider.

Lifestyle choices can help protect against developing colorectal cancer and other cancers. The American Cancer Society recommends the following to reduce a person's risk:

- Do not smoke
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Be physically active on a regular basis
- Make healthy food choices
- Limit alcohol consumption

No single food or nutrient protects against colorectal cancer by itself; a variety of factors in foods work together to provide anti-cancer effects. There is convincing evidence that a high-fiber, plant-based style of eating, incorporating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans, helps lower the risk for several cancers, including colorectal cancer. For more information about healthy eating to reduce your cancer risk, visit www.AICR.org.

The New York State Cancer Services Program (CSP) provides breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings at NO COST to women and men who:

- Do not have health insurance OR have health insurance that does not cover the cost of these screenings
- Cannot pay for these screenings
- Meet income eligibility requirements
- Meet age requirements
- Live in New York State

Additional services include diagnostic testing if results are abnormal and referrals for treatment. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact the Cancer Services Program at 1-866-442-2262 or visit http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/cancer/services/community_resources and click on your county.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion, emergency preparedness and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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