

Risk Factors

The strongest risk factors for developing cancer of the colon or rectum are age (older than 50), personal or family history of colorectal cancer and/or polyps, personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, and inheriting a certain genetic mutation. Being obese, physical inactivity, smoking, heavy alcohol use, and a diet high in fat and low in fruits and vegetables may increase your risk of getting colorectal cancer.¹

Warning Signs and Symptoms

There are no symptoms in the early stages of the disease. Later, symptoms that would occur include: bleeding from the rectum, blood in the stool, a change in bowel habits, and cramping in the lower abdomen. However, many of these symptoms may be caused by other benign (harmless) health conditions. Please check with a doctor or other health professional if you have any of these symptoms.¹



Early Detection

The American Cancer Society recommends that adults at average risk (no family or genetic history) should start screening at age 50 (earlier if you are at higher risk) with any of the following tests: fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT) every year; flexible sigmoidoscopy, double-contrast barium enema (DCBE), or CT colonography every 5 years; colonoscopy every 10 years; or stool DNA testing (interval not determined).¹

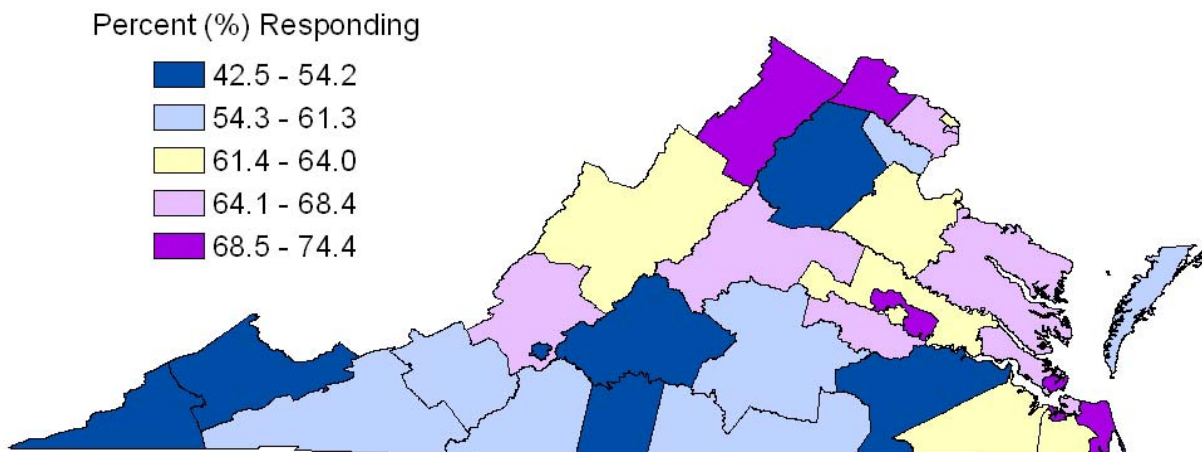
Colon Cancer in Virginia

- Colorectal cancer was the **third** most commonly diagnosed cancer among men and women in the U.S. and in Virginia.^{2,3} According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated **148,810 people** in the U.S., *including 3,690 people in Virginia*, will be diagnosed with colon cancer in 2008.¹
- Colon cancer was the **third** leading cause of death due to cancer in the U.S. and in Virginia.^{2,4} An estimated **49,960 people** will die from colon cancer nationwide, *including 1,260 people in Virginia*, in 2008. Colon cancer will account for 10% of all new cancer cases diagnosed and 8-9% of all cancer deaths in the U.S.¹
- Between 2001 and 2005, Virginians were diagnosed with colon cancer at a rate of **48.6 cases** per 100,000,³ and died at a rate of **18.9 deaths** per 100,000.⁴ The U.S. incidence rate was 50.6 cases and the mortality rate was 18.8 deaths per 100,000.²
- Nine of ten (90%) colon cancer cases were diagnosed in people 50 and older.² One-in-18 (5.65%) men and one-in-20 (5.23%) women will be diagnosed with colon cancer during their lifetime.¹
- In Virginia, men were more likely to die from colon cancer than women. Black men and black women were more likely to die from colon cancer than their white counterparts. Incidence rates were also greater among men and blacks.^{3,4} National data indicates that

Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians have lower colon cancer incidence and mortality rates, although colon cancer was the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in these groups.²

- From 1995 to 2005, the colon cancer incidence rate increased slightly in Virginia, while the death rate declined by 31%.^{3,4}
- The five-year relative survival rate for colon cancer is **90%** if diagnosed early.¹ Colon cancer is treatable when detected early. In Virginia, 36% of colon cancer cases were diagnosed in the earliest (local) stage when it's most curable. Women and whites were more often diagnosed early than either men or blacks.³
- According to a 2006 state health behavior survey, **65%** of Virginians 50 and older had an endoscopic test (e.g., colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy) at some point in their lifetime—above the national average of 57%. One-in-four (26%) Virginians had a home blood stool test in the past two years (the national rate was 24%). Rates of colon endoscopy were lowest among adults who were ages 50-59, less educated, lower income, and uninsured.⁵ Cumberland Plateau (42.5%), Roanoke City (46.5%), and Pittsylvania/Danville (50.4%) had the lowest colon endoscopy rates among the 35 health districts (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Colon Endoscopy by Health District, Adults 50 and Older, Virginia, 2004-2006



Source: Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Percentages are weighted.

- In Virginia, there were 2,365 inpatient hospitalizations for colon cancer that occurred in 2006, at a total charge (cost) of nearly \$103 million. The average length of stay was nine days, and the average charge per stay was \$43,492.⁶

¹ American Cancer Society *Cancer Facts & Figures 2008* (<http://www.cancer.org>).

² Ries LAG, Melbert D, Krapcho M, Stinchcomb DG, et al. (eds.), *SEER Cancer Statistics Review, 1975-2005*, National Cancer Institute. Bethesda, MD: 2008 (http://seer.cancer.gov/csr/1975_2005/).

³ Virginia Cancer Registry. Based on combined data from 2001-2005. Rates are age-adjusted to the 2000 U.S. standard population.

⁴ VDH Division of Health Statistics. Based on combined data from 2001-2005. Rates are age-adjusted to the 2000 U.S. standard population.

⁵ Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Rates are population-weighted.

⁶ Virginia Health Information Hospital Discharge Patient-Level Dataset.