

Breast Cancer Screening is Still Important During the COVID-19 Pandemic

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and The American Cancer Society is urging women to talk to their doctors to find out what's best for them

ATLANTA, Sept. 30, 2020 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, elective medical procedures, including cancer screening, were largely put on hold to prioritize urgent needs and reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in healthcare settings. One consequence of this has been a substantial decline in cancer screening.

As states re-open businesses and ease restrictions, many healthcare facilities are starting to offer elective procedures again, including cancer screening. Restarting cancer screening requires careful consideration of the risks and benefits of screening, along with ensuring safety for both patients and healthcare personnel.

Decisions about restarting screening depend on many factors, and they may not be the same for every person. They will likely vary by community while the pandemic continues.

If an appointment was made for screening that was postponed or canceled, patients should talk to their healthcare team about when to reschedule. Providers can discuss balancing the risks and benefits of being screened now or postponing for a later date, considering personal and family history, other risk factors, and the timing of the last screening test.

"Finding breast cancer early and getting high-quality cancer treatment are the most important strategies to prevent deaths from breast cancer. Getting regular screening tests is a critically important part of finding breast cancer early," said Dr. Laura Makaroff, Senior Vice President, Prevention and Early Detection for the American Cancer Society. "Breast cancer screening disparities are already evident and without focused attention, are likely to increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to promote breast cancer screening and overcome barriers for populations with low screening prevalence must be at the forefront of our focus," said Makaroff.

Many women get an annual mammogram for breast cancer screening. However, leading organizations that issue screening guidelines recommend that average risk women ages 55 and older can be screened every two years. Women 55 or older who had a normal mammogram within the last year could choose to have their next mammogram up to 24 months after your last one.

As your regular facility for health care returns to providing cancer screening, it's important that it is done as safely as possible. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommendations for healthcare facilities to reduce the risk of COVID transmission:

- Screening centers should be available to answer questions from patients via phone or web portal before and/or after the screening procedure.
- Patients should be pre-screened for COVID-related symptoms before screening appointments.
- Scheduling of appointments should allow for physical distancing between patients, and longer appointment times, if needed, to avoid crowding in waiting rooms and patient care areas.
- There should be limitations on visitors other than patients and/or their caregivers into the screening facility.
- If not done in front of the patient, the screening center should be able to explain how often equipment and surfaces are disinfected and cleaned.
- Everyone, including patients and staff, should wear a face covering or face mask, where appropriate. There should be frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizer by staff, patients, and visitors.

SOURCE American Cancer Society

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