

# Panhandle

## Public Health District

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### **Colon Cancer Awareness Month Encourages Nebraska Communities to Talk, Screen, and Save Lives**

During Colon Cancer Awareness Month, Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) encourages residents to start conversations, understand their risk, and prioritize colorectal cancer screening. Early detection can prevent cancer or find it at a stage when treatment is most effective.

Colorectal cancer, cancer of the colon and rectum, remains the second leading cause of cancer-related death in Nebraska. An estimated 940 new cases and 360 deaths are expected in 2025. Despite being one of the most preventable cancers, too many Nebraskans are diagnosed at later stages when treatment becomes more difficult.

Screening saves lives. Colorectal cancer often develops without noticeable symptoms in its early stages. Regular screening can detect precancerous polyps before they turn into cancer and can identify cancer early when survival rates are significantly higher.

Nebraska's colon cancer incidence rate is approximately 44.2 per 100,000 residents. Health officials emphasize that most adults at average risk should begin screening at age 45. Individuals with a family history of colorectal cancer or certain medical conditions may need to start earlier.

Rural communities face unique challenges such as barriers to screening that include limited access to healthcare providers, longer travel distances for colonoscopy services, and cost concerns. Research shows rural populations are less likely to be up to date on colorectal cancer screening compared with urban residents, increasing the risk of later-stage diagnosis.

"Colon cancer screening saves lives, and it is one of the most powerful preventive tools we have," said Cheri Farris, Panhandle Public Health District Wellbeing Program Coordinator. "We encourage families to talk openly about their health history and make screening a priority."

Know the signs and take action. While colorectal cancer may not cause symptoms early on, warning signs can include changes in bowel habits, blood in the stool, persistent abdominal discomfort, unexplained weight loss, fatigue, or weakness. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should speak with a healthcare provider right away.



Residents are encouraged to talk with their healthcare provider about screening options. At-home stool-based tests may be available through PPHD and clinics and can be a convenient option for those who live far from healthcare facilities.

Talk to your healthcare provider today about which screening options are best for you. For information about free at-home screening resources for Panhandle residents ages 45 - 74, contact Cheri Farris, [cfarris@pphd.ne.gov](mailto:cfarris@pphd.ne.gov) or at 308-220-8020. Learn more at [https://pphd.ne.gov/Pages/colon\\_cancer\\_prevention.htm](https://pphd.ne.gov/Pages/colon_cancer_prevention.htm)

You can also help promote colon cancer awareness and screening by wearing blue on Wear Blue Day Friday, March 6th. Wear blue that day to show your support for those living with colon cancers and promote early screening and detection. Share it with PPHD to promote on social media by emailing [cfarris@pphd.ne.gov](mailto:cfarris@pphd.ne.gov)

For additional information about worksite wellness, visit [www.pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html](http://www.pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html) or call Berosek at 308-279-3496. The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council is proudly part of Panhandle Public Health District. The Council specializes in supporting employers in the Panhandle region. We recognize that many employers support a diverse and remote workforce and offer innovative ways to overcome the challenge of working with a virtual team. We understand that many of our employers do not have full-time wellness resources and work to provide resources and training to make running a worksite wellness program as easy as possible.

Did you see the latest PWWC newsletter? If not, check it out here: <https://pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html>

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle community.