



NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

For information contact: Shawna Rhine, Community Outreach Coordinator/Public Information Officer
Southern 7 Health Department & Head Start
Phone: 618-634-2297 ext. 971161 Cell: 618-614-9223 Email: srhine@s7hd.org

(2/25/25) – At-Home Colon Cancer Screening Continues to Save Lives (March is Colorectal Cancer (CRC) Awareness Month)

March is Colorectal Cancer (CRC) Awareness Month; a time when healthcare providers increase their patient/provider conversations about regular colonoscopies. But for patients who are hesitant to begin the process or needing an in-between screening, Southern 7 Health Department (S7HD) continues to provide an at-home screening option that has proven to be effective in saving lives.

Through a partnership that began in 2019 and continues today between S7HD, the Hope Light Foundation, University of Chicago Medicine, and Penn State College of Medicine, the health department has offered the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT); an at-home screening that detects blood in the stool with 97% accuracy. This free test requires no prescription or prep to those 45 and older or are at high risk for developing CRC.

Although the test does not determine if the patient has cancer, blood can be an indicator of colon polyps. Patients who test positive for blood are referred for a colonoscopy to rule out cancer and that is where FIT is making an impact.

Since September 2019, 556 people have completed the test through Southern 7 with 17% (99 people) testing positive. This is higher than the national positivity rate of 7-12%. Of those who tested positive only 36 followed-up with a colonoscopy. While none of these patients presented with cancerous polyps, more than half, 58%, presented with pre-cancerous colon polyps that were removed, thus preventing colorectal cancer.

“What is concerning to us is the number of patients who tested positive with FIT and didn’t have a colonoscopy compared with those who tested positive, got a colonoscopy, and had pre-cancerous colon polyps,” said Shawna Rhine, S7HD Community Outreach Coordinator. “FIT is so easy to complete and is often recommended by doctors in our region as an option for care. But the key to its success and your survival is getting a colonoscopy if you test positive.”

Recent data shows that death rates from CRC are falling in the southern seven county region of Illinois. This can be attributed, in part, to education and patient participation in early detection of colorectal cancer. Colonoscopies and annual screenings with a FIT kit, followed by regular tests as prescribed by your doctor, can detect early cancerous polyps to be removed.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that adults age 45 to 75 be screened for colorectal cancer. The decision to be screened between ages 76 and 85 should be made on an individual basis and discussed with your doctor.

“The southern seven counties of Illinois, served by Southern 7 Health Department, sit in one of three “hot spots” for CRC. That’s why it’s important that we offer this program,” said Rhine. “When found early, CRC can be prevented with nearly a 100% effectiveness rate, so FIT is saving lives.”

To request a free FIT kit from S7HD call 618-634-2297 or visit www.southern7.org. If you need help paying for a colonoscopy following a positive FIT test, Southern 7 may be able to help.

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