

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month



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The fall season brings an influx of pink ribbons and education around breast cancer and its prevention. In 2006, more than 190,000 new cases of breast cancer were reported nationwide and more than 41,000 women died from the disease. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among adult women in the U.S. and the second leading cause of cancer death among women. One of every eight adult women will get breast cancer in her lifetime.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supports breast cancer surveillance and research and provides free or low-cost mammograms to underserved women. In 2010, an estimated 207,090 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed in women in the U.S., along with 54,010 new cases of non-invasive breast cancer.

Breast cancer is an uncontrolled growth of breast cells. The growth becomes uncontrollable without treatment, ultimately resulting in the formation of a tumor. A tumor can be either benign (noncancerous) or malignant (cancerous). Related to this description, a cancer growth can also be non-invasive (confined to the infected area) or invasive (spread to surrounding breast tissue), which determines the severity of disease upon detection.

Breast cancer is preventable with early detection

According to *Vital Signs*, a special publication of CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), more than 7 million women have not had a recent mammogram, an X-ray of the breasts, to screen for breast cancer as recommended. Mammograms can find breast cancer early, before it is large enough to feel or cause physical symptoms. All women aged 50 to 74 should have a mammogram every two years, and those between 40 and 50 years should talk with their doctor about when to start screening.

Breast cancer risk is linked to age, ethnicity, and family history of disease

The risk of cancer increases with age. Although white women are more likely to get breast cancer, African American women are the most likely to die of it. Minority women are most likely to have advanced breast cancer when the cancer is first discovered. Women of other ethnic backgrounds (Asian, Hispanic, and Native American) have a lower risk of developing and dying from breast cancer than white women and African American women. If a close family member (e.g. mother, father, grandmother, sister, or aunt) has had breast cancer, the risk for other family members getting breast cancer may be higher. If you think you may be at increased risk, ask your doctor if you should be tested earlier or more frequently than standard recommendations.

For more information about breast cancer or to find out how to get a free or low-cost mammogram, go to www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast, or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO.