Disproportionately Affected

The Black community has the highest rate of colorectal cancer of any racial/ethnic group in the U.S.

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Following the devastating news of the death of the world's beloved Black Panther, Chadwick Boseman, from colorectal cancer, many were left asking why—and how. What most don't know is that Chadwick Boseman sat at the intersection of where colorectal cancer rates are among the highest and rising the fastest. He was a young man. And he was a Black man.

Colorectal cancer affects far too many in this country and disproportionately impacts the Black community, with among the highest rates of colorectal cancer of any racial/ethnic group in the U.S. African Americans are 20% more likely to get colorectal cancer and 40% more likely to die from it than other groups. Black men have the highest incidence rate.

"Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer in the country," said Durado Brooks, M.D. vice president of prevention and early detection at the American Cancer Society. "This disease is ravaging the Black community and it is as important as ever that everyone has access to and is receiving the recommended screenings. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, necessary screening tests remain available to prevent the disease or find it at an early, more treatable stage."

In addition, rates of colorectal cancer in younger age groups is rising. In 2020, 12% of colorectal cancer cases will be diagnosed in people under 50 – about 18,000 cases. Since the mid-1980's adults age 20-39 have experienced the steepest increase in colorectal cancer rates.

The American Cancer Society recommends that people with average risk begin regular screening at age 45.

Those with higher risk should consider—with their physician—earlier screening. Higher risk factors include:

- family history of colorectal cancer or certain types of polyps
- personal history of colorectal cancer or certain types of polyps
- personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)

- known family history of a hereditary colorectal cancer syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or Lynch syndrome (also known as hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer or HNPCC)
- personal history of radiation to the abdomen (belly) or pelvic area to treat a prior cancer

In addition, anyone with concerning abdominal or gastro-intestinal symptoms such as a change in bowel habits that lasts for more than a few days; rectal bleeding; blood in the stool; cramping or abdominal pain; weakness and fatigue; or unintended weight loss should consult with their doctor.

Screening can prevent colorectal cancer by finding and removing growth, called polyps, in the colon and rectum before they become cancer. It can also find colorectal cancer early, when it is small, hasn't spread and may be easier to treat. When found early, before it has spread, the 5-year relative survival rate is 90%.

For more information or to speak with an someone about colorectal cancer and its effects on the Black community, experts and physicians from the American Cancer society can provide interviews, information and valuable resources.

SOURCE: African American Cancer Fact and Figures: 2019-2022

SOURCE: Colorectal Cancer Screening Guidelines

SOURCE: Signs and Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

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