Risk factors for colorectal cancer rising among older adults, millennials in Massachusetts, data shows

COVID-19 pandemic highlights availability of effective at-home screening options

BOSTON, July 30, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- Known risk factors for colorectal cancer have increased significantly among Massachusetts millennials and older adults, but only about a third of 50-52-year-olds are getting the recommended screenings (36%), according to the latest Health of America report from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association



Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) found:

- Rates of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes rose 10% among millennials and 18% among adults age 50-64 in four years.
- Rates of diagnosed obesity shot up 37% among millennials and 50% among adults age 50-64 in four years.
- Rates of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis increased 30% among adults age 50-64 in four years.

The report shows that people with these conditions are at 1.3-1.9 times higher risk of being diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

At the same time, according to a national survey by the Blue Cross Association of more than 1,000 commercially insured Americans who were asked about barriers to screening highlighted in the report, about 60% of people 50 and older, and nearly half of people with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis are not getting screened because of a discomfort with the process or a lack of awareness about the need.

"Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths inthe United States. Fortunately, screening for colorectal cancer modestly reduces the risk of dying from this form of cancer," said Dr. Mark Friedberg, BCBSMA's head of performance measurement and improvement.

Friedberg added, "People at average risk may not realize that there are several options for colorectal cancer screening. These include tests that can be completed in the comfort, privacy and safety of their home as opposed to going into a medical facility for a colonoscopy. At-home tests may be an attractive screening option for patients, especially now, when patients are looking to stay on top of their cancer screenings while minimizing their risk of exposure to COVID-19."

Friedberg encourages patients at high risk for colorectal cancer, including those age 50 and above and younger patients with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, diabetes or diagnosed obesity, to talk to their physician about their screening options.

The report shows that Massachusetts is among the states with a lower prevalence of colorectal cancer in the U.S. Although the Commonwealth has the second-highest rate of colorectal screening in the country (36%) behind Hawaii (38%), still only about one-third of Massachusetts residents age 50-52 have been screened.

About the report
The "Health of America Report: Rise in Chronic Conditions Is Putting More Americans at Risk for Colorectal Cancer,"uses the Blue Cross Blue Shield Health Index. The index quantifies over 200 different health conditions to identify which diseases and conditions most affect Americans' longevity and quality of life. It is powered by annual data from more than 41 million commercially insured BCBS members. The BCBS Health Index informs national and local discussions about how to improve U.S. health, health policy and healthcare practice. This is the 32nd Health of America Report from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. For more information on this and previous reports visit www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/reports.

About the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association
The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association is a national federation of 36 independent, community-based and locally operated

Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies that collectively provide health care coverage for one in three Americans. BCBSA provides health care insights through The Health of America Report series and the national BCBS Health Index. For more information on BCBSA and its member companies, please visit bcbs.com. We also encourage you to connect with us on Facebook, check out our videos on YouTube, follow us on Twitter and check out our blog.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable health care with an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

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