

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

# Medical News

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## Cancer Experts Encourage Others Not to Delay Cancer Screenings

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Timely cancer screenings are critical for early detection and increasing chances of long-term survival. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, however, has resulted in a significant drop in cancer screenings, leaving the global oncology community concerned that this decrease will result in dramatically higher rates of advanced-stage cancers.

The National Cancer Institute estimates that the screening decline will likely lead to nearly 10,000 deaths – all preventable – over the next 10 years in the United States from breast and colorectal cancer alone due to pandemic-related delays in screening and treatment.

“We have reliable cancer screening tools available for colorectal, cervical, breast and prostate cancer, as well as lung cancer screening for individuals who are at increased risk for this disease based on smoking history. It is so important that people continue to get timely cancer screenings to improve chances of detecting cancer in its earliest — if not precancerous — stages,” says [David E. Cohn](#), MD, MBA, chief medical officer and a gynecologic oncologist at [The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute](#). “The last thing we want is for people to avoid seeking medical help and to present with advanced-stage disease that is more difficult to treat.”

According to a January 2021 [statement](#) from the [National Comprehensive Cancer Network](#) and the [American Cancer Society](#), more than one third of adults have failed to receive recommended cancer screenings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, 43% of patients have missed preventive appointments due to COVID-19 fears.

“The oncology community has been tracking rates of cancer screening throughout the pandemic, and the trends are quite concerning because they all point to dramatically lower rates of screening adherence, as well as a reduction in preventive health appointments in general,” says OSUCCC Director [Raphael E. Pollock](#), MD, PhD, FACS, a surgical oncologist at The

James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute and member of the OSUCCC – James [Translational Therapeutics Program](#).

Pollock is also a cancer survivor living with chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) as a chronic condition. “Screening saves lives. The earlier cancer is detected, the more options there are for treatment and the better the chances for survival,” he says. “It is imperative that we prioritize cancer screening as long as it is safe to do so and encourage anyone experiencing concerning health symptoms to not delay seeking medical advice. I sought out help when I had concerns, and it literally saved my life. The fact that I’m willing to talk to my patients about my own disease situation has brought me that much closer to the people who have trusted me with their care.”

Pandemic-related disruptions to cancer screening and treatment also have potential to worsen existing health disparities in cancer screening access and survival in populations already at increased risk for cancer due to social and economic obstacles. [Electra Paskett](#), PhD, MSPH, associate director for population sciences and community outreach at the OSUCCC – James, who studies cancer health disparities in Appalachian communities, says this is especially concerning because screening rates were already lower in these at-risk communities, and cancer mortality rates were higher due to barriers to health care access and other socioeconomic factors.

“There is no question that the pandemic has – and will continue – to hit this population disproportionately hard. As a community, we must proactively work to lessen this disparity gap and help people recover from the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: mentally, socially and financially,” says Paskett, who also serves as co-leader of the OSUCCC – James [Cancer Control Program](#) and is a three-time cancer survivor. “I understand what it’s like to be told, ‘You have cancer.’ I’m living proof of the importance of consistent mammograms. If you missed your appointments during the pandemic, don’t worry about being late. The most important thing is that you go and get screened now. It can save your life.”

### **Cancer Screening and Testing at Ohio State**

Cancer screening exams are available through the OSUCCC – James and can be made by calling 1-800-293-5066. In addition, the OSUCCC – James has launched a [Cancer Diagnostic Center](#) to give individuals direct, expedited access to diagnostic testing. The goal is to provide immediate, community-wide patient access to cancer providers for anyone with a suspected cancer, especially in communities where access to health care is limited and has become even more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are doing everything we can to make OSUCCC - James a safe haven for our patients to obtain cancer care,” says Cohn. He notes that, while OSUCCC - James has resumed in-person care, many patient follow-up appointments have been transitioned to virtual visits to reduce the number of trips a patient has to make to the hospital. Cancer hospital clinical operations have been modified on a clinic-by-clinic basis to reduce points of contact. In addition, the hospital continues to follow strict infection risk practices, including limiting visitors to the hospital, masking for all staff and frequent handwashing.

Visit [NCCN.org/resume-screening](https://www.nccn.org/resume-screening) to read the entire letter. For general guidance and information about cancer, visit [NCCN.org](https://www.nccn.org) or [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org). To learn more about patient care at the OSUCCC – James, visit [cancer.osu.edu](https://cancer.osu.edu).

**About the OSUCCC – James**

The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute strives to create a cancer-free world by integrating scientific research with excellence in education and patient-centered care, a strategy that leads to better methods of prevention, detection and treatment. Ohio State is one of 51 National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers and one of only a few centers funded by the NCI to conduct both phase I and phase II clinical trials on novel anticancer drugs sponsored by the NCI. As the cancer program's 356-bed adult patient-care component, The James is one of the top cancer hospitals in the nation as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* and has achieved Magnet® designation, the highest honor an organization can receive for quality patient care and professional nursing practice. With 21 floors and more than 1.1 million square feet, The James is a transformational facility that fosters collaboration and integration of cancer research and clinical cancer care. To learn more, visit [cancer.osu.edu](http://cancer.osu.edu).