

For patients whose colonoscopies were cancelled during the COVID-19 Pandemic, we have provided you with **COLorectal Outreach Via Internet or Dial-in - 19** point checklist.

If your colonoscopy was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and/or if you are hesitant to proceed with routine screening during this very challenging time, please review our educational 19-point checklist regarding colon cancer and implications of delaying screening. In March 2021, we will be offering Saturday screenings at selected sites across AHN to provide access for those who delayed their colonoscopy due to the current COVID-19 Pandemic.

Please call 412-359-8900 for further information.

COLorectal Outreach Via Internet or Dial-in - 19 point checklist

1. Your endoscopic procedure was cancelled and rescheduled for a later date.

Will your health be compromised because of this delay?

- We as your GI provider have carefully reviewed your history and reason for performing your colonoscopy. It has been determined that rescheduling your procedure is safe and allows you to minimize any potential exposures within the medical facility.
- Please refer to the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) for additional questions you may have regarding COVID19 and your colonoscopy.
 - ACG: <https://gi.org/media/covid-19-and-gi/> - scroll down and look for patient information
 - ASGE: <https://www.asge.org/>

2. If you have symptoms such as cough, fever, shortness of breath, or sore throat prior to your **rescheduled** colonoscopy, please contact us at by phone at 412-359-8900 or by MyChart to make us aware of any symptoms you are having. We will provide you with recommendations for the best course of action to take accordingly. A pre-call assessment will be made prior to your **rescheduled** procedure. However, let's review what you can do to keep your colon healthy.

3. EXERCISE

- Get plenty of exercise during this time to maximize your physical health
- Walking, jogging, spinning, lifting weights, yoga, biking
- Any type of sport that can be performed in your backyard such as shooting hoops, kicking a soccer ball, or walking in the neighborhood.

4. DIET

- Low in fatty or fried foods
- High in fiber with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Vitamin D and calcium are recommended

5. ALCOHOL INTAKE

- Minimal alcohol defined as no more than one alcoholic beverage per day at most

6. TOBACCO/VAPING

- Abstain from tobacco or vaping not only during this period but also overall
- Long-term smokers consider quitting at this time as tobacco increases your risk of cancer of all types including colorectal cancer and even respiratory complications should you be exposed to COVID-19.

7. MENTAL HEALTH MAINTENANCE

- This is a time of significant anxiety and depression for obvious reasons including the pressure to perform for your family
- Make sure to get plenty of sleep which will keep your immune system strong
- If you are temporarily out of work, there is economic pressure
- If you are a mother, father, or guardian, there may be the stress of children with homeschooling
- If your children are home from college, there may be financial and/or emotional stress
- If you are 65 years or older, you may more be anxious or worried about your health
- Please make sure to reach out to a behavioral health specialist if you notice that you are feeling overly anxious or depressed. You can call 412-359-8900, and press 9 for **Behavior Health Specialist**.

8. [screenforcoloncancer.org](https://www.screenforcoloncancer.org)

- Refer to this site to see how colon cancer is preventable, treatable, and curable.



9. UNDERSTANDING COLONOSCOPY

What is a colonoscopy?

- Your doctor will examine the lining of your large intestine (colon) for abnormalities using a flexible tube with a camera on its tip which is slowly advanced into the rectum and colon.
- The instrument, called a colonoscope, has its own lens and light source which allows your doctor to view images on a video monitor.

What happens during the colonoscopy?

- Colonoscopy is well-tolerated and rarely causes any pain. You might feel pressure, bloating or cramping during or after the procedure.
- Typically, your doctor will give you a sedative to help you relax and better tolerate any discomfort.
- You will lie on your side or back while your doctor slowly advances the colonoscope along your large intestine to examine the lining. Your doctor will examine the lining again as the colonoscope is withdrawn.
- The procedure itself usually takes less than 45 minutes, although you should plan on two to three hours for waiting, preparation and recovery.
- In some cases, the doctor cannot pass the colonoscope through the entire colon to where it meets the small intestine. Your doctor will advise you whether any additional testing is necessary.

What if the colonoscopy shows something abnormal?

- If your doctor thinks an area needs further evaluation, he or she might pass an instrument through the colonoscope to obtain a biopsy (a small sample of the colon lining) to be analyzed. Biopsies are used to identify many conditions, and your doctor will often take a biopsy even if cancer is not suspected.
- Your doctor might also find polyps during colonoscopy, and he or she will most likely remove them during the examination.
 - Polyps are benign growths (noncancerous tumors or neoplasms) involving the lining of the bowel. They can occur in several locations in the gastrointestinal tract but are most common in the colon.
 - Polyps are very common in adults, who have an increased chance of acquiring them, especially as we get older.
 - The biggest risk factor for developing polyps is being older than 50. A family history of colon polyps or colon cancer increases the risk of polyps.
 - There are two common types: hyperplastic polyp and adenoma. The hyperplastic polyp is not at risk for cancer. The adenoma, however, is thought to be the precursor (origin) for almost all colon cancers, although most adenomas never become cancers.
 - Most polyps cause no symptoms. Larger ones can cause blood in the stool, but even they are usually asymptomatic.
 - If polyps are found, your doctor will decide when your next colonoscopy is necessary based on national guidelines. The timing depends on several factors, including the number and size of polyps removed, the polyp tissue type and the quality of the colon cleansing for your previous procedure.



10. UNDERSTANDING BOWEL PREP

What bowel preparation steps are involved before the colonoscopy?

- You will receive specific instructions from your doctor's office on the type of bowel prep best prescribed for you.

Why is bowel prep important?

- Your bowel must be clean so that your doctor can thoroughly examine your colon.
- Many patients feel that the bowel prep is the most difficult part of a colonoscopy.
- But it is important that you try your best to fully complete the prep.

What are the common side effects of bowel prep?

- Some patients have: nausea, vomiting, bloating (swelling in the abdomen) or abdominal pain.
- The type and severity of side effects differ among patients, which your doctor will explain to you.
- You may start to evacuate within an hour of ingestion of your prep but it may take longer for this process to begin. The rate of evacuation varies amongst patients.



11. BOWEL PREPARATION FROM ALLEGHENY CENTER FOR DIGESTIVE HEALTH

- Please follow the instructions that the office will send you for your colonoscopy.
- If you have not received them or if you have questions call 412-359-8900.

12. COMPLICATIONS

- These will be discussed with you on the day of your procedure prior to start.
- Complications are rare and include but are not limited to bleeding, infection, perforation (tear in the bowel wall), risks of anesthesia, injury to other organs (i.e. spleen, colon, liver).

13. ANESTHESIA

- You will be sedated for the colonoscopy so that your physician can remove any polyps that are seen during the exam while you rest comfortably.

14. TRANSPORTATION

- Please ensure that you have a driver to bring you to the facility and take you home after the procedure.
- Public transportation including taxi, bus, subway, UBER and lyft are permitted as forms of acceptable transportation if accompanied by a responsible adult.
- PALS (People Able to Lend Support) is permitted for Highmark Medicare Advantage patients

15. INSURANCE

- Fully covers *screening colonoscopy* if age 50 or older or if age 45 and African American

16. FIND A DOCTOR

- Get to know your physician before rescheduling your colonoscopy and check out their profile at AHN.org

17. FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Do you know anybody age 50 or older who has not had their colonoscopy?
- If yes, please educate them about the importance of colon cancer screening and early detection and try to convince them to schedule *their* colonoscopy.

18. EXTENDED HOURS OF OPERATION

- Once the healthcare facilities resume standard operations, AHN may offer extended hour and/or weekend procedures to improve access to care as a result of cancellations that occurred during this time. Consider inquiring about such opportunities if your schedule permits.

19. REMEMBER TO RESCHEDULE YOUR COLONOSCOPY

- One of the schedulers from our practice should have already contacted you to reschedule your procedure.
- If your procedure has not been rescheduled as of yet, please contact us at 412-359-8900 so that we can assist you accordingly.

Remember that the lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is 1 in 23 patients and that it is the 2nd leading cause of cancer death among men and women in the U.S. There will be an estimated 147,950 new cases of colorectal cancer in 2020. Sixty-percent of colorectal cancer deaths can be prevented with screening so please schedule your colonoscopy soon.

Please stay safe and healthy during this time.

Elie Aoun, MD, MS
Chief, Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
AHN Medical Director for Clinical Access
Allegheny Health Network

Katie Farah, MD, FASGE
Chief Quality Officer, Division of Gastroenterology
Allegheny Health Network
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Drexel University College of Medicine



Allegheny
Health Network