

LAST PLACE FINISH



Last place means we're **#1!**

If you live in Benton County, you live where the chance of contracting colon cancer is the lowest in the state, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). For Dr. Brian Meeker and his team, the accomplishment feels like confirmation that lives can be saved by providing safe, effective, and conveniently accessible colonoscopy services in a family medicine practice.

Colorectal cancer caused 50,630 deaths in 2018. It is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. and a form of cancer that regular screening can prevent. "Iowa has an elevated risk of colon cancer; the state is ranked fifth in both incidence and deaths," says Dr. Meeker. "The increased risk Iowan's face is one reason we are very proud of achieving the lowest incidence rate in the entire state among people who are 50 years old and older."

Meeker believes integrating colonoscopy services into primary care has been essential to achieving the low rate. "When a patient has to drive for 45 minutes or an hour to be screened and has to wait for months to get an appointment, they are more likely to avoid having the procedure. Colonoscopy is the only screening that saves lives, and the more people we screen, the lower the rate of colon and rectal cancer."

"We've made this a priority for 25 years," says Dr. Meeker, "and for some time our data has shown that our record of safety is much better than the national average; we are extremely effective in finding the polyps that eventually cause colon cancer. Now we know we've helped achieve the lowest incidence of colorectal

cancer in Iowa because of everyone's hard work over such a long period."

"In the 4,000-plus colonoscopies we've performed, there were many tens of thousands of pre-cancerous polyps we've removed and destroyed," explains Meeker. "Removed polyps don't grow to become cancers, and the cancer data show that our patients enjoy longer lives because of the screening we perform."

"We take a team approach during a colonoscopy, and I believe having eight sets of experienced eyes looking at the monitor improves detection rates," Meeker says. "It isn't uncommon for a team member to ask him to stop to examine something they've found. 'I'm guiding the instrument and am the one removing polyps, but everyone in the room knows what we're looking for and everyone is encouraged to help. See something say something is the motto.'"


"Colorectal cancer rates in the 80's and 90's were climbing, and we weren't effectively combatting the disease," according to Meeker. "Back then most people were screened with a sigmoidoscopy, which is an examination of the lower 1/3 of the colon. The idea was that if the lower 1/3 was clear of polyps, then the rest of the colon probably was as well. The number of sigmoidoscopies was increasing, but the cancer rate wasn't going down. Obviously, sigmoidoscopy wasn't the answer. The problem was that at the time, colonoscopies were performed by general surgeons or by gastroenterologists, but there weren't enough of those physicians to screen additional millions of people.

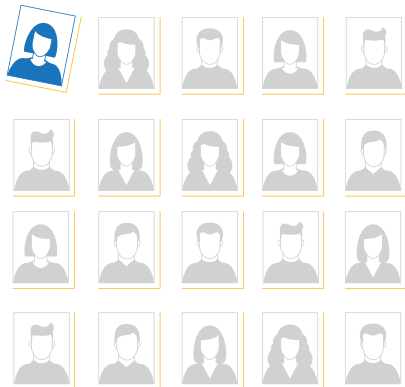
The American Academy of Family Physicians

published a paper that encouraged family physicians to offer colonoscopy screening as a way of reducing colorectal cancer deaths. Dr. Meeker, who had always been interested in endoscopy services and its potential for saving lives, was quick to gain the training and experience needed to provide those services at Virginia Gay. "I had great support from Virginia Gay administrator Mike Riege, and our general surgeon at the time, Dr. Daly, gladly trained me because he was near the end of his career and because he believed we needed to find a solution that protected our patients from this disease."

Only 5% of family physicians have gained colonoscopy expertise and provide the service to their patients. In addition to colonoscopy being rare in the family medical setting, many patients believe that screening is best when provided by specialists.

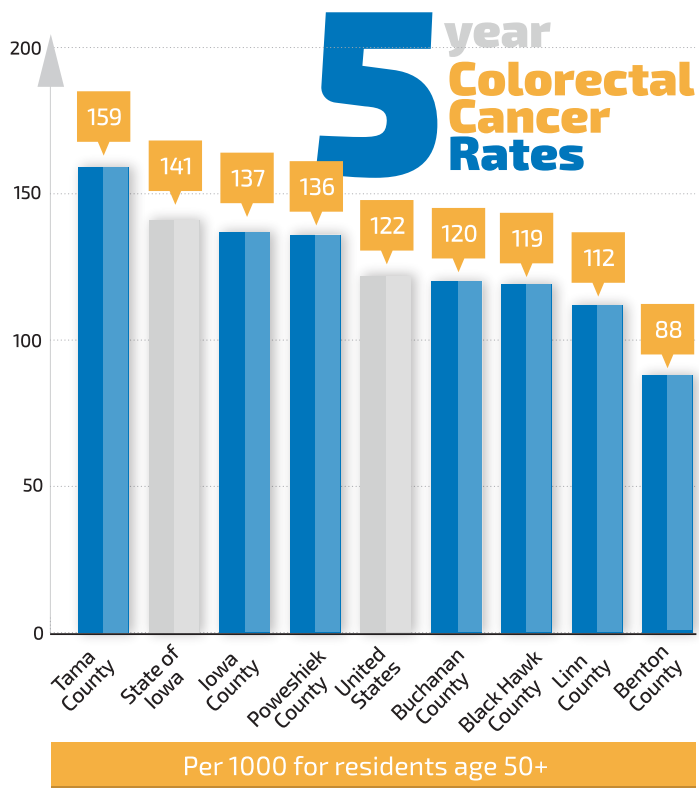
"I am not a gastroenterologist; our team hunts polyps, and we do it well," says Brian. "As part of our screening, we do uncover gastrointestinal diseases and conditions that only a gastroenterologist is trained to manage. Sometimes we find it because the patient neglected to share all their entire health history or all the symptoms they've experienced. When we uncover signs of gastrointestinal conditions or diseases, we refer patients to a gastroenterologist who specializes in the treatment of those conditions."

To learn more about reducing your risk of colorectal cancer, or to schedule a colonoscopy, talk with your primary care provider. Visit www.myvgh.org to find a provider at one of Virginia Gay Hospital's family medicine clinics. 



1 in 20

people will be diagnosed with colon cancer in their lifetimes



* <https://statecancerprofiles.cancer.gov> 95% confidence level



DR. MEEKER and Erik King, PA-C, walk through the hall between procedures. About one quarter of the endoscopies performed at Virginia Gay by Dr. Meeker are upper GI scopes, and roughly three quarters are colonoscopies.

Myths and Facts ABOUT

INFLUENZA

FLU MYTH

Influenza is just a real bad cold; it's not dangerous.



FLU FACT

Influenza can be very dangerous and can cause complications, even death. More than 80,000 people died from flu-related illnesses in the U.S. in the 2017-2018 flu season.

FLU MYTH

The flu shot will protect you from all forms of the flu.



FLU FACT

The annual flu vaccine includes three strains of the virus that are predicted to be active that year. However, should you be exposed to a type of flu not included in the shot, you could still get sick.

FLU MYTH

The flu vaccine will give you the flu.



FLU FACT

The flu vaccine does not contain the live virus. It cannot give you the flu. In addition many people mistake a stomach virus for influenza. They are not the same.

FLU MYTH

I do not need the influenza vaccine every year.



FLU FACT

Because flu viruses evolve so quickly, last year's vaccine may not protect you from this year's viruses. New flu vaccines are released every year to keep up with rapidly adapting flu viruses.

FLU MYTH

People with egg allergies cannot get a flu shot.



FLU FACT

New vaccines are available that are safe for those with egg allergies. Discuss this concern with your provider to choose the best vaccine for you.