

DATA BRIEF: Colorectal Cancer Screening: The California Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS), 2013

Introduction

This report summarizes the prevalence of colorectal cancer (CRC) screening in California as well as some of the reported reasons why people have never been screened or are not up to date on their screening. CRC is a common disease especially among adults over the age of 50 years, and is the second leading cause of cancer death, second only to lung cancer.¹ Unfortunately, this is the case despite the fact that most CRC can be prevented or successfully treated, especially if diagnosed at early stages. Incidence rates of colorectal cancer have decreased over the last 20 years, due at least in part to better CRC screening. However, in California, more than 50% of cases of CRC are diagnosed at a late stage, when survival rates are poor.¹

CDC CRC Screening Guidelines

The CDC follows the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendations for CRC screening beginning at age 50 years and continuing until age 75 years.² Based on the

USPSTF recommendations, CDC defines a person over the age of 50 years as up to date on CRC screening based on one of three screening options: 1) a high-sensitivity fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT) completed annually; 2) a flexible sigmoidoscopy completed every five years and additionally completing a FOBT/FIT every three years; and/or 3) a colonoscopy completed every ten years.

2013 California BRFS Results

Who is not getting screened?

Over one-third (36%) of Californians over the age of 50 years reported that they were not up to date with the USPSTF screening guidelines and one-quarter had never had any CRC screening. However, these numbers differed for different demographic groups (Figure 1). People with health insurance reported being up to date with CRC screening much more often than those without any insurance. People over the age of 65 years reported being up to date on screening more often than younger people (between the ages

The California Colon Cancer Control Program

The California Colon Cancer Control Program (C4P), a program of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), works to increase public awareness of colorectal cancer and the importance of early detection of colorectal cancer through screening. As a grantee of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Colorectal Cancer Control Program (CRCCP) and a part of a national alliance, C4P promotes the shared goal of having 80% of adults age 50 and older regularly screened for colorectal cancer by 2018.

California Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

The California Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) is an annual survey that asks respondents about a number of health-related topics.³ Questions regarding colorectal cancer in 2013 focused on what type of colorectal screening tests and the frequency of the tests an individual has had, along with questions regarding barriers to receiving those tests. This survey serves as a tool for public health agencies to use in surveillance efforts for many health-related issues, including CRC screening. More information about BRFS is available at the following website: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/data/surveys/Pages/BRFSS.aspx>.

of 50 and 64 years). Non-Hispanic respondents reported being up to date on screening more often than Hispanic respondents. People above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) also reported being up to date on screening more often than those below 200%.

Figure 1. Percent of Californians over 50 who have never had CRC screening, 2013 BRFSS

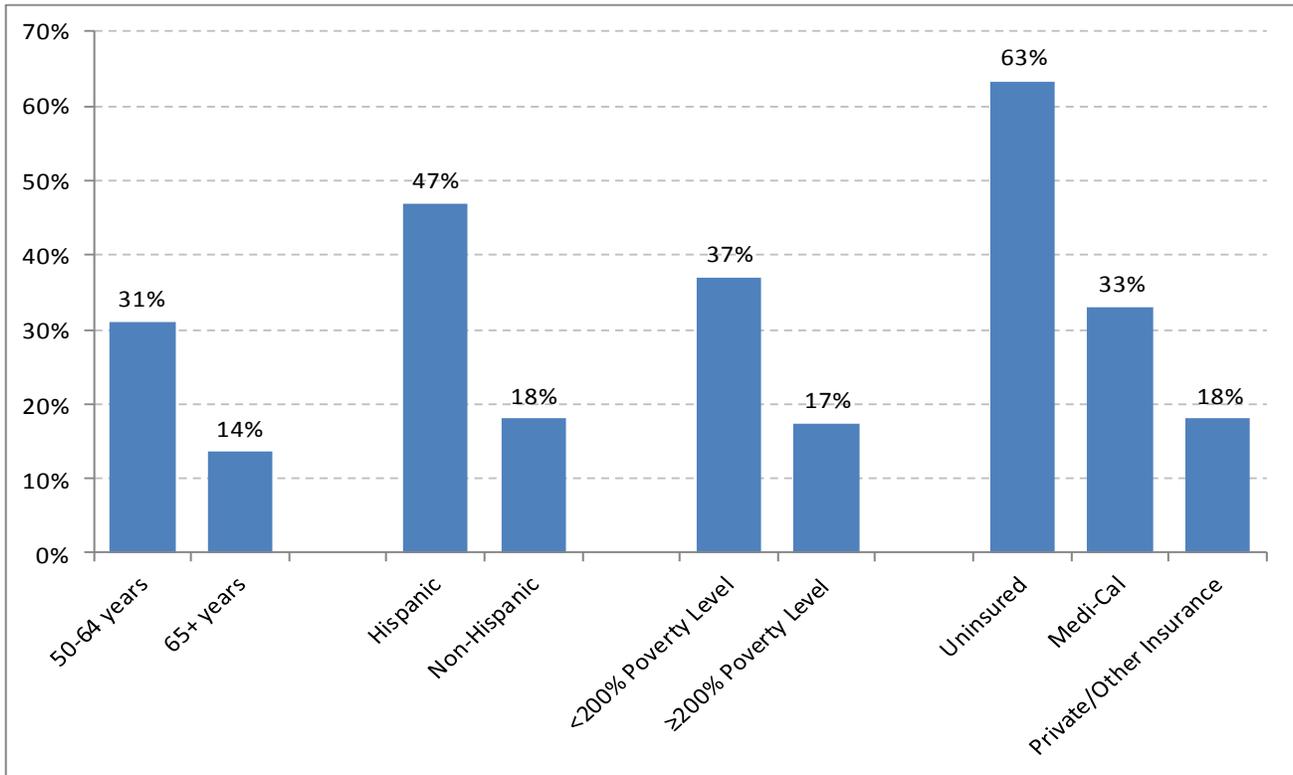


Table 1. Primary reasons for not getting CRC screening, 2013 California BRFSS

Why aren't people up to date on screening?

The most commonly reported reasons for never having had any CRC screening, or not being up to date on CRC screening in 2013 were: 'no specific reason, I just never thought about it'; 'my doctor did not tell me that I needed

	No reason/never thought about it	Doctor did not tell me I needed it	I haven't had any problems	Too expensive / no insurance	Other reasons
Total	22.7%	22.8%	10.0%	10.8%	33.6%
Age Group					
50 – 64 years	22.8%	21.2%	8.4%	14.4%	33.2%
65+ years	22.4%	26.9%	14.3%	*	34.6%
Hispanic Ethnicity					
Hispanic	22.7%	20.4%	13.8%	17.9%	25.3%
Non-Hispanic	22.3%	24.1%	8.7%	7.7%	37.3%
Poverty					
≤200% FPL	21.3%	21.5%	13.4%	20.5%	23.3%
>200% FPL	23.9%	22.9%	7.3%	4.7%	41.3%

* Insufficient sample size (N≤16)

it'; 'I have not had any problems'; and 'it's too expensive / I don't have health insurance' (Table 1). Primary reasons for not being screened differed by age, ethnicity, and household income. Older respondents (65 years and older compared with those aged 50 to 64 years) more often cited that they 'haven't had any problems' as their primary reason for not being up to date on screening, but otherwise their responses were similar to younger adults. Hispanic respondents more often cited both cost and that they 'haven't had any problems' as the primary reasons they had not been screened. Similarly, respondents below 200% of the FPL also cited those reasons more often than those higher-income respondents. 'Other' reasons included 'put it off / laziness,' 'didn't know I needed to be tested,' 'too painful, unpleasant, embarrassing,' 'I don't have a doctor,' 'fear of finding cancer,' and 'unspecified other.'

Conclusion

Despite the widely recognized benefits of CRC screening for those over the age of 50 years, 25% of California adults reported that they had never been screened. This report found that the groups who were less likely to be up to date on CRC screening (those with lower income, Hispanic ethnicity, and between 50 and 64 years old) were also the groups who were more likely to report cost and insurance issues as the primary reason for not being up to date. This information illustrates the importance of and the need for further education and the removal of barriers to CRC screening in order for California to reach the national target of 80% screened by 2018.

References

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