



NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Pritzker & IDPH Remind Illinoisans that Early Detection is Most Effective Way to Fight Breast Cancer

State of Illinois Observes National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October; Governor Issues Mammography Day Proclamation for October 20

CHICAGO – With National Breast Cancer Awareness Month underway across the country, Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) are reminding the public that early detection is the most effective way to prevent the deadly disease. The Governor has issued a proclamation declaring October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month and October 20 as Mammography Day in Illinois. However public health officials are urging Illinoisans not to wait and to schedule a comprehensive exam as soon as possible.

“Regular mammograms can help detect breast cancer at an early stage when treatment is most successful. That’s why it’s important that anyone who delayed screenings during the pandemic should schedule an exam with their provider,” Governor Pritzker said. “And for those who are uninsured or underinsured, IDPH operates the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program which offers free mammograms and other important services.”

While there was a precipitous drop in cancer screening tests during the pandemic, public health officials say it will take time to measure the impact of the screening gap.

“Breast cancer has affected multiple members of my family and is a personal issue to me,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “I know how important mammograms are in detecting breast cancer early and saving lives. A sharp decrease in the number of mammograms administered during the COVID-19 pandemic has me concerned about more advanced, difficult to treat cases of breast cancer in Illinois. I encourage Illinoisans to schedule a comprehensive exam as soon as possible and ask your doctor about breast cancer screening.”

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Public health officials note that breast cancer does not only impact women. Men, non-binary individuals, and trans men and women also can experience breast/chest cancer, and it is important for everyone to understand their cancer risk by consulting a trusted provider

Data indicates persistent disparities in breast cancer and that more Black women die of breast cancer than any other racial or ethnic group.

The breast cancer statistics are stark:

- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women 20 to 59.
- One in eight women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.
- A woman is diagnosed with breast cancer in the U.S. every two minutes.
- In Illinois, 10,500 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year.

Risk factors for breast cancer include older age, a family history of breast or ovarian cancer and having dense breasts. Dense breasts are seen in half of woman over 40 and the density can make it harder for small cancers to show up on a mammogram. Women are urged to consult with their health care provider about their risk factors and whether additional breast cancer screening is warranted.

Risk factors for breast cancer can be controlled by being physically active, maintaining a healthy weight and limiting alcohol intake.

For those who are uninsured or underinsured, IDPH operates the [Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program \(IBCCP\)](#) which offers free breast exams and mammograms. The program also assists with treatment options.

To enroll in IBCCP, call the Women's Health Line 888-522-1282 (800-547-0466 TTY). The Women's Health Line will be able to walk women through the eligibility requirements and the screening process.

Since the inception of the IBCCP in 1995, the program has performed more than 822,000 screenings for more than 351,000 women. In the most recent full year, state fiscal year 2023, the program performed 14,757 breast cancer screenings and 5,321 cervical cancer screenings.

Women also can contact their [local IBCCP agency](#) and schedule an appointment.

For more information about the importance of regular screening for breast cancer, see [this video presentation](#) from IDPH.

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