Where You Live Might Determine Whether You Get a Colon Cancer Screening

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In America, it's well known that race andethnicity affect who gets colon cancer screenings. But now it appearsthat where people live also determines whether or not they'll getscreened, according to a study published in the journal *Cancer* and reported in a news release from the University of California Davis Health System.

Colon cancer (a.k.a. colorectal cancer) is the fourth most common cancer in men and women.

Forthe study, researchers analyzed data of 53,990 people on Medicare, ages69 to 79, from 11 regions in the United States. With the exception ofAsian-Pacific Islanders in Hawaii, scientists found that whites weremore likely than non-whites to have regular colorectal screenings.(This means they had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy—currently the goldstandard tests for colon cancer—within the past five years or a fecaloccult blood test within the past year.)

Asian-Pacific Islandershad the highest screening rates with more than half recently screenedfor colon cancer compared with 38 percent of whites.

Asian-PacificIslanders are very aware of the importance of screenings becausegastrointestinal cancer is common among Hawaii's Japanese population,said Thomas Semrad, MD, the study's lead researcher.

As for thelow rates of screenings among other ethnicities in the United States,Semrad suggested that these people may be visiting medical practicesthat don't offer colorectal cancer screenings.

Researchersneed to look at different geographic areas to see what the screeningdeterminants are for minorities, Semrad said. "Are these culturallybased? Are there problems with how health care systems are set up? Whatare the barriers? If we can figure this out, we would have a target toimprove some of these disparities."

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