



Breast Cancer Awareness Month 2019 – Key Messages

Purpose: Breast cancer screening messaging for regions to use during Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM) (October).

- October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The Central East Regional Cancer Program is encouraging Ontario women ages 50 to 74 to talk to their family doctor or nurse practitioner about getting checked for breast cancer.
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Ontario women.¹
- One in eight women will get breast cancer in her lifetime.²
- Research shows that women ages 50 to 74 who get checked regularly with mammograms can lower their chance of dying from breast cancer. It is also important for women to talk with their family doctor or nurse practitioner about getting more tests if they have an abnormal mammogram.³

About Breast Cancer

- When breast cells begin to divide, they sometimes form a lump, called a “tumour.” Some tumours are benign (not cancer) and some tumours are cancer.
- Every year, about 12,000 women in Ontario will get breast cancer and about 2,000 women will die from it.⁴
- In Ontario, breast cancer usually develops later in life, with over 83% of cases being diagnosed in women over age 50.^{5,6}
- Getting checked regularly with a mammogram is important. Mammograms can find breast cancer early when it may be smaller and less likely to have spread to other parts of the body. Treatment may also have a better chance of working when breast cancer is found early.
- Breast cancer has one of the highest survival rates of all cancer types in Ontario.^{7,8} When caught early, almost all women will survive. However, if breast cancer is found later, only two out of 10 women will survive.
- Fewer than one out of 100 women are at high risk of getting breast cancer.⁹

¹ Cancer Care Ontario. Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Care Ontario; 2018.

² Cancer Care Ontario. Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Care Ontario; 2018.

³ The Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care. Recommendations on screening for breast cancer in average risk women aged 40-74 years. CMAJ. 2011; 183(17):1991-2001.

⁴ Cancer Care Ontario. Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Care Ontario; 2018.

⁵ Cancer Care Ontario. Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Care Ontario; 2018.

⁶ Surveillance, Analytics and Informatics, 2018. [Unpublished internal document], Cancer Care Ontario.

⁷ Cancer Care Ontario. Ontario Cancer Statistics 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Care Ontario; 2018.

⁸ Cancer Quality Council of Ontario. Cancer System Quality Index (CSQI) 2018. Toronto, ON: Cancer Quality Council of Ontario.

⁹ Blackhouse G, Goeree R. Budget Impact Analysis for Magnetic Resonance Imaging Screening of Women at High Risk for Breast Cancer in Ontario. Program for Assessment of Technology in Health (PATH). 2007 May 8.

Causes of Breast Cancer

- There are many reasons a woman may get breast cancer—some reasons are better understood than others.
- There are some habits or personal characteristics, called “risk factors,” that increase a woman’s chance of getting breast cancer.
- Some risk factors cannot be changed such as age, family history, personal history of breast cancer or benign breast conditions, or dense breast tissue.¹⁰
- Some risk factors can be changed. Here are steps that can be taken to lower your chance of getting breast cancer:
 - limit alcohol—any amount of alcohol can increase the chance of getting breast cancer;
 - quit smoking and stop using tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes and chewing tobacco);
 - be physically active as part of everyday life;
 - have a healthy body weight; and
 - limit time on oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy.¹¹

Breast Awareness

- The OBSP recommends that women at average risk for breast cancer be breast aware. This means knowing how the breasts look and feel so that women are more likely to notice any unusual changes. As breast cancer grows over time, the following changes may occur:
 - a new lump or dimpling on the breast;
 - new changes in the nipple or fluid coming from the nipple;
 - new redness or skin changes that do not go away; or
 - any other new changes in the breasts.
- If a woman notices any changes in her breasts or has concerns, she should see her family doctor or nurse practitioner, regardless of her age. Most changes are not cancer, but they should be checked right away.

Breast Cancer Screening Recommendations

- The Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) is a province-wide, organized cancer screening program. The goal of the program is to lower the chance of dying from breast cancer through regular screening. The OBSP also helps to make sure women with abnormal screening test results get follow-up, such as more tests or appointments.
- The OBSP screens two different groups of women who qualify for breast cancer screening in Ontario: those at average risk and those at high risk.
- Average Risk: The OBSP recommends that most women ages 50 to 74 get checked every two years with mammography.
 - Ontario women ages 50 to 74 are eligible for average risk screening if they:
 - have no breast symptoms;
 - have no personal history of breast cancer;
 - have no current breast implants;

¹⁰ Canadian Cancer Society [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Canadian Cancer Society. Risk factors for breast cancer. Available from: <http://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-type/breast/risks/?region=on>

¹¹ Ibid.

- have not had a mastectomy; and
 - have not had a screening mammogram within the last 11 months.
- High Risk: The OBSP recommends that women ages 30 to 69 who are confirmed to be at high risk of getting breast cancer get checked once a year with a mammogram and breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) (or screening breast ultrasound if MRI is not medically appropriate) through the High Risk Ontario Breast Screening Program (High Risk OBSP).
 - The OBSP recommends that women ages 70 to 74 who are confirmed to be at high risk for breast cancer get checked once a year with a mammogram through the High Risk OBSP.
 - For more information on eligibility for the High Risk OBSP, please visit: www.cancercareontario.ca/highriskobsp.

Benefits and Limitations of Breast Cancer Screening

- Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, even before you have symptoms.
- Screening tests are not perfect and may miss some cancers. Also, some cancers can grow in the time between screens.
- Mammogram results are sometimes abnormal, but when a woman has more tests (e.g., biopsies), they might show that there is no cancer present. This is called a “false-positive” result.
- Some breast cancers that are found through screening may never harm a woman during her lifetime. Therefore, some women may have surgery or treatment for a breast cancer that would have never been life-threatening. This is called over-diagnosis.
- Although screening increases the chances of finding cancer early, some cancers found at screening cannot be treated successfully.