Announcement

National Family History Day — November 24, 2016

In 2004, the U.S. Surgeon General declared that Thanksgiving would be National Family History Day, a day designed to encourage American families to learn about and create a written record of their family health history. Family history can identify those persons with a higher-than-average risk for many common diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes. Having at least one first-degree relative with a disease can increase a person's risk twofold or more (*1*). Family history is also a determinant of less common diseases like sickle cell disease and cystic fibrosis (*1*). Persons who might be at increased risk because of family history might benefit from screening or other interventions to prevent disease or detect it earlier.

An estimated 20% of women with family histories of breast and ovarian cancer might have cancer-causing mutations in *BRCA* genes (*2*). Discussing family history of cancer with patients can help providers identify persons at higher-than-average risk, foster discussions about genetic counseling and testing, and help them make informed decisions about risk reduction. Public health programs at the federal and state levels are working to increase collection and assessment of family history and identify persons at high risk and their families.

This Thanksgiving, CDC encourages everyone to learn about their family histories of cancer and other conditions. Several resources are available to help facilitate these conversations, including the U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative's Before You Start (http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/familyhistory/start/startenglish.pdf) and My Family Health Portrait Tool (https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/FHH/html/index.html), CDC's information on family history (http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/famhistory/index.htm), and the Know:BRCA Family Cancer History worksheet (https://www.knowbrca.org/Learn/gathering-family-history).

References

1. Valdez R, Yoon PW, Qureshi N, Green RF, Khoury MJ. Family history in public health practice: a genomic tool for disease prevention and health promotion. Annu Rev Public Health 2010;31:69–87. http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.012809.103621
2. Nelson HD, Fu R, Goddard K, et al. Risk assessment, genetic counseling, and genetic testing for BRCA-related cancer: systematic review to update the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation. Evidence Synthesis No. 101. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality publication no. 12–05164-EF-1. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2013.