



For Immediate Release:

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News Release

Thanksgiving is National Family Health History Day

UDOH urges Utahns to know their family health history of cancer

(Salt Lake City) – Family health history is an important tool in understanding a person’s risk of developing cancer. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is encouraging Utahns to take advantage of Thanksgiving and other holiday gatherings as an opportunity to ask family members three important questions: (1) who in their family has ever had cancer, (2) what type of cancer did they have, and (3) at what age were they diagnosed.

“While these questions may seem simple, the answers could change how often you need to have certain cancer screenings or even what treatment options you should consider,” said Lynette Phillips, Director of the UDOH Cancer Control Program. “When healthcare providers and genetic counselors know your family history, they can help you come up with a personalized plan for your future.”

The UDOH urges Utahns to speak with a genetic counselor if they notice any of these red flags in their family history:

- Blood relatives that had cancer, such breast or colon cancer before age 50.
- Two or more blood relatives on the same side of the family that had the same type of cancer or related cancers. For example, breast and ovarian cancers are related, as are colorectal and uterine cancer.
- Blood relatives that had more than one type of cancer.
- Blood relatives that had a rare type of cancer or tumor.

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Most people who develop cancer have no family history of it, but occasionally cancer can run in families due to their genetic make-up. Sharing your family health history with a healthcare provider or genetic counselor can help determine if you are at a higher risk for certain cancers than most people. People who are at higher risk may benefit from starting cancer screenings at a younger age, having more frequent cancer screenings, or undergoing more advanced screenings such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). Medications or surgical procedures may also help prevent or delay cancer in high-risk individuals.

There are a variety of medical tests which can identify whether or not individuals and families have a genetic condition, such as Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer or Lynch Syndrome, which increases their risk for cancer. It's important for individuals having these tests to know what they're being tested for, what the possible outcomes may be, and what their options are after getting the results.

More tools and information about family health history collection, genetic counseling and testing, Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer, Lynch Syndrome, and resources for healthcare providers are available on <http://cancerutah.org/genomicseducation>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.