



NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Stresses Need to Close Cancer Screening Gap Caused by COVID-19 Ahead of National Mammography Day

Governor JB Pritzker Issues Mammography Day Proclamation for Illinois; Number of People Screened for Breast Cancer Dropped Dramatically During COVID-19 Pandemic

CHICAGO – With National Mammography Day approaching on October 21, Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) are urging women in Illinois who have delayed breast cancer screenings due to the COVID-19 pandemic to take action and schedule a comprehensive exam now.

“Breast cancer is a tragic disease—taking the lives of more than 40,000 women throughout the nation each year,” said Governor Pritzker, who issued a proclamation declaring October 21 is Mammography Day in Illinois. “But thanks to modern medicine, we can lower that number with early detection and regular mammograms. This National Mammography Day, I encourage the women of Illinois to schedule their annual mammogram, especially those who’ve delayed their exam amidst the chaos of the pandemic.”

The [National Cancer Institute](#) has said that an estimated 9.4 million screening tests that normally would have taken place in 2020 did not happen because of the pandemic.

“Breast cancer is personal to me, having affected multiple members of my family,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “I know how important mammograms can be when it comes to providing early detection that can save lives. Illinois and the rest of the nation saw a sharp decrease in the number of mammograms administered during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are seriously concerned that this drop will lead to many advanced cases of breast cancer, which will be more difficult for medical professionals to treat. I encourage all eligible Illinois women 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 health disparities that have previously been detected – that show more Black women die of breast cancer than any other racial or ethnic group – could be exacerbated by the screening gap.

IDPH reminds the public that the department's [Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program \(IBCCP\)](#) offers free breast exams and mammograms to uninsured and underinsured women. The program also supports diagnostic services and assists with referrals for treatment options.

To enroll in IBCCP, women can 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.

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

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