Mammograms & COVID-19 Vaccines

Cancer screenings have slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for breast and colorectal. Less screenings have resulted in fewer diagnoses. As the much anticipated COVID-19 vaccine becomes available to more people, it's important to keep in mind the vaccine, like others, can cause an immune system response that could impact other health screenings such as a mammogram for a short time.

How do COVID-19 vaccines affect screening results?

- Researchers are saying that swollen lymph nodes caused by COVID-19 vaccination can produce "false positives" in breast cancer mammograms.
  - Swollen lymph nodes have occurred under the arm or near the collarbone on the same side of the body where the vaccine was administered.
    - Lymph nodes are part of the body's immune system. They swell as a normal response to a foreign substance, such as a vaccine or infection.
    - However, enlarged lymph nodes can also be a sign of cancer.
    - If a swollen lymph node from COVID-19 is identified on a screening mammogram and needs further evaluation, the medical facility will ask the patient to return for a focused ultrasound of the area.

How does this affect future screenings?

- Some medical facilities are delaying breast cancer screenings for 4-6 weeks after getting the vaccination.
  - This applies to **screening** exams (where no symptoms are present).
    - Check with your medical facility on specific scheduling delays.
  - Diagnostic exams being done after breast cancer symptoms are discovered should **not** be postponed.
    - In those who already have breast cancer, an enlarged lymph node can be a sign that it has spread.

What if I am uninsured or cannot afford a screening?

- The All Women Count! (AWC!) Program provides low-income, uninsured, and under-insured women in South Dakota timely breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services. Mammograms, Pap smears, and related exams are available at no cost to eligible women.

How do I find out if I am eligible for the All Women Count! (AWC!) Program?

- Call 211 or text 898211 to speak to our Health Screening Specialist for more information on health resources, eligibility and services, or to enroll.

For more information, call 211 or search our online database:

- helplinecenter.org/211database
  - Try the following keyword search terms:
    - Cancer Detection
    - Disease/Disability Information

Source:
Healthline: https://www.healthline.com/health-news/covid-19-vaccine-can-cause-false-positives-on-breast-cancer-mammograms

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