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# Maine and Kentucky Make Strides in Reducing Colorectal Cancer

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When Maine Governor John Baldacci signed a bill titled An Act Relating to Insurance Coverage for Colorectal Cancer Early Detection on March 26, Maine became the 24th state to mandate insurance coverage for colorectal cancer screening. Less than a month later, Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear signed a similar bill that provides colorectal cancer screening to uninsured and underinsured individuals.

Late last year, Rep. Ed Mazurek (D-Maine) introduced the bill, which overwhelmingly passed Maine's House and Senate in March. The state law mandates screening coverage for individuals who have symptoms of colon cancer, are at high risk for the disease, or are over 50. Maine already mandates screening coverage for breast and cervical cancers.

"This is one of those bills that make you feel good when it's accomplished," says Mazurek, who has received positive feedback from the community and members of Maine's Congress. "This bill [will] save lives."

Kentucky's Colon Cancer Screening Act establishes a program headed by the state's Department of Public Health to provide screening services to people ages 50 to 64 as well as highrisk individuals without insurance.

Nearly half of the United States has laws that require the coverage, and Medicare provides annual fecal occult blood tests at no cost to people over 50, in addition to regular flexible sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy screenings.

Currently, only 60 percent of Maine residents who should be screened for colon cancer take advantage of it, making colon cancer the second most common cause of cancer death in the state. And in Kentucky, the mortality rate for colorectal cancer is 18 percent higher than the national average.