

## PRINT-New Dense Breast Notification Law Takes Effect Jan 1

Mammography remains the gold-standard imaging tool for early detection of breast cancer but some women might need additional screening. That includes women who have dense breasts.

A new Illinois law which went into effect January 1 requires any facility that offers mammograms to notify women if the results show they have dense breasts. Illinois' law is the first in the country to direct women to their breast imaging health care provider for information about the notification. Previous laws have directed women to their referring doctor for questions.

Jessica Guingrich, Medical Director of OSF HealthCare's Center for Breast Health in Peoria and a radiologist with Central Illinois Radiological Associates, says it can be more difficult to detect cancer in women with dense breasts using traditional mammography which relies on seeing contrast.

"We're trying to find white findings so the denser tissues means there's more whiteness in the background and it's harder to see those white findings," Dr. Guingrich explained.

Breast density has a very specific medical definition and radiologists use national guidelines based on the amount of fibrous tissue within the breast.

"The density actually has nothing to do with how they feel on physical exam or the breast size. It actually has to do with that appearance on the mammogram," according to Dr. Guingrich.

The goal of the new legislation is to reduce missed, delayed and advanced stage breast cancer by increasing access to early detection for women with dense breasts. Catching cancer early can reduce the need for less aggressive treatments and improves outcomes. According to the [American Cancer Society](#), women who have dense breast tissue have a four to six percent higher risk of developing breast cancer than those who do not and at least 40 percent of all women fall into that category.

So what are the best options for women who receive the notification? Dr. Guingrich says that will depend on a woman's risk factors. She stresses having dense breasts is a **minor** risk factor compared to other considerations.

Guingrich says there are more significant factors.

"Like if one has a first-degree relative or a pre-menopausal relative diagnosed with breast cancer or if they have a personal history of breast cancer, those women are at higher risk. If a lady is a gene carrier or if a lady has had chest wall radiation."

Guingrich points out the rate of detecting the most aggressive forms of breast cancer has increased by 40 percent with the use of 3D mammography which is recommended for women no matter what their breast tissue density. 3D imaging uses multiple X-rays to create a sharper image that shows tissue structures in more detail.

The good news is that Illinois is one of seven states nationwide with an insurance mandate that requires coverage for 3D mammography and whole breast ultrasound. Insurance will also cover an MRI for women who are screened and determined to be at high risk for developing breast cancer.

[Here is more information](#) about breast density. [Find an imaging location near you](#) to schedule your next mammogram.