

Getting Your Routine Mammogram During COVID-19

Since March, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused hospitals across the country to take extra measures to protect anyone coming through their doors. This included cancellation of non-essential procedures and tests.

In May, OSF HealthCare began a phased approach to bring these services back online, including routine mammograms. It is generally recommended for women to get an annual mammogram starting at the age of 40, earlier if you have a family history of breast cancer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. At this time, a mammogram is the best way to find breast cancer for most women.

"Screening mammography has taken some advancements in the past years where physicians and patients are both seeking 3-D imaging options as opposed to the standard 2-Dimensional in the past. All four of our units that we have at OSF Little Company of Mary Medical Center and our OSF Centers for Health are all 3-D capable, so wherever you schedule your test with us you will be able to get the 3-D imaging," said Kate Eschbach, Director, Medical Imaging & Cardiology, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center.

Also known as breast tomosynthesis, 3D mammography helps radiologists identify and characterize individual breast structures without the confusion of overlapping tissue. Many OSF HealthCare facilities offer 3D mammography options, and protocols are in place to ensure cleanliness and safety at each facility.

"The cleaning protocols that we do go through in between each patient are according to CDC standards as well as the original manufacturer recommendations on what kind of cleaning solutions best protect the patient from any of the exposures within community spread as well as what is safest for the equipment so that it continues to provide best imaging for our patients," explained Eschbach.

"During the arrival process, we have changed some of our workflows with patients arriving. We do take them in in a staggered approach through the registration areas so there is not multiples patients all arriving, say, for 8 a.m. appointments. We've staggered them out to a bit of odd times, so 8, 8:05, 8:10 may be an unusual time to schedule a test; however, it allows for us to properly distance patients as they're coming in the front doors to be seen by registration. And then once the registration process is completed with those patients, they are brought directly back to the area of treatment that they're having. So, mammography would be to the main mammography department here at the main campus or at the Centers for Health."

Each OSF HealthCare facility is taking increased measures to keep those seeking care safe from infection in accordance with guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and CDC. OSF is also monitoring everyone coming into its hospitals and off-site facilities while maintaining physical distancing in waiting areas.

The focus remains on the best interest of a patient's health overall.

"The process was very easy and simple. Somebody greeted me at the door and they took my temperature. They asked how I was feeling. And after that, then I went in and I registered and it only took a few minutes to register. Then they brought me over, they told me to go sit in the orange section.

So everything, the seating, was designated by color so there was a blue section, and orange section and I think maybe a green section – and I guess the orange section is where they were doing the mammograms,” said Susan Buchanan, community member who recently had a mammogram at OSF Little Company of Mary's Center for Health in Oak Lawn.

"There is really no, well you are not seeing anybody else, you are sitting away from people the way the seating arrangement is so it was very convenient and very comfortable,” continued Buchanan.

For more information, and to schedule a mammogram at an OSF HealthCare location, go to <https://www.osfhealthcare.org/breast-health/services/mammogram/>.