

Bowel Cancer Screening

About one in 20 people in the UK will develop bowel cancer during their lifetime. It is the third most common cancer in the UK, and the second leading cause of cancer deaths, with over 16,000 people dying from it each year.¹

Regular bowel cancer screening has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer by 16 per cent.²

Bowel cancer screening aims to detect bowel cancer at an early stage, in people with no symptoms, when treatment is more likely to be effective. Bowel cancer screening can also detect polyps. These are not cancers, but may develop into cancers over time. They can easily be removed, reducing the risk of bowel cancer developing.

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme started being rolled out in July 2006 and achieved nation wide coverage by 2010.

Programme hubs operate a national call and recall system to send out faecal occult blood (FOB) test kits, analyse samples and despatch results. Each hub is responsible for coordinating the programme in their area and works with up to 20 local screening centres.

The screening centres provide endoscopy services and specialist screening nurse clinics for people receiving an abnormal result. Screening centres are also responsible for referring those requiring treatment to their local hospital multidisciplinary team (MDT).

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme offers screening every two years to all men and women aged 60 to 69. People over 70 can request a screening kit by calling the freephone helpline - 0800 707 6060.

Men and women eligible for screening will receive an invitation letter explaining the programme and an information leaflet entitled [Bowel Cancer Screening - The Facts](#).

About a week later, an FOB test kit will be sent out along with step-by-step instructions for completing the test at home and sending the samples to the hub laboratory. The test will then be processed and the results sent within two weeks. Around 98 in 100 people will receive a normal result and will be returned to routine screening. They will be invited for bowel cancer screening every two years if still within the eligible age range.

Around 2 in 100 people will receive an abnormal result. They will be referred for further investigation and usually offered a colonoscopy.

Around 4 in 100 people may initially receive an unclear result which means that there was a slight suggestion of blood in the test sample. This could be caused by conditions other than cancer such as haemorrhoids (piles). An unclear result does not mean that cancer is present, but that the FOB test will need to be repeated. Most people who repeat the test will then go on to receive a normal result.

In December 2007 the Cancer Reform Strategy stated that the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme would be extending the age range for screening from April 2010 to invite men and women up to their 75th birthday.

[1]CancerResearch UK, 2005. Cancerstats

[2] Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2006. Screening for colorectal cancer using the faecal occult blood test: an update