

What is bowel screening?

Bowel cancer is a common type of cancer in both men and women. About 1 in 20 people will get it during their lifetime. Bowel cancer screening involves having tests to check if people are at risk of bowel cancer. People aged 60 to 74 are routinely sent an invite to receive a FIT (Faecal Immunochemical Test) kit every two years. It is a home testing kit used to collect small samples of your poo which is then posted to a laboratory so it can be checked for tiny amounts of blood (which could be caused by cancer). People age over 75 can ask for a home testing kit every 2 years. The screening programme in England started rolling out the offer of a bowel scope test to people aged 55 to look for and remove any small growths called polyps that could eventually turn into cancer if not removed. This is currently suspended as the NHS prioritises appointments for higher risk patients that need follow up tests. Plans are in place to look at alternative ways of testing this age group.

Bowel screening during COVID-19

- During the COVID-19 surge, bowel screening providers took the decision to reschedule appointments for tests to a later date to protect patients from the virus and as staff carrying out colonoscopies were redeployed to respond to the pandemic. As a result, services planned to also reschedule invitations to send out FIT kits to a later date.
- All services across the country are now delivering colonoscopies with services urgently prioritising and making good progress in seeing patients with a FIT positive screen that need follow up tests. Telephone appointments with specialist screening practitioners have also been set up so appointments can be held over the phone where appropriate.
- Alongside this, plans are in place to shortly send out invites for FIT kits where people didn't receive them during the coronavirus surge, as part of the routine programme. People that have received a FIT kit should also return them as normal, where they will be tested as normal.
- To focus on patients that need follow up tests and treatment, routine bowel scope screening for people aged 55 is currently not taking place. We are working on alternative plans for people aged 55 that accepted the offer of a bowel scope test.

Comms narrative

- In response to the coronavirus pandemic and to protect the public, bowel cancer screening services took the decision to reschedule appointments and invitations to a later date. The NHS is urgently prioritising appointments for people that need follow up tests following their bowel cancer screening result, including telephone appointments with a specialist screening practitioner (SSP) where appropriate. People who are overdue FIT kit invites will receive them as soon as possible. People who have already received a FIT kit should now use and return it. As always, anyone who thinks they have symptoms of bowel cancer should contact their GP practice as soon as possible.

Q&As

When will screening start again/When will people get their FIT kits?

The NHS is urgently prioritising appointments for people that need follow up tests due to a positive screen, while working on plans for people get their FIT kit invites as soon as possible. People who have already received a FIT kit should return them as normal. As always, anyone who thinks they have symptoms of bowel cancer, should contact their GP practice.

Has bowel scope stopped and why?

To focus on patients that need follow up tests and treatment, routine bowel scope screening for people aged 55 is currently not taking place. We are working on alternative plans for people aged 55 that accepted the offer of a bowel scope test.

Will the delays increase the risk of people getting cancer?

The majority of cancers detected through screening are at an early stage, and the percentage of people diagnosed with early cancer suggests that a delay of a few months in detection would still mean the bowel cancer was treatable. The more advanced the cancer is when detected, the more serious the impact, so we would advise anyone with suspected bowel cancer symptoms , <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer/symptoms/>) to contact their GP immediately.

More detailed FAQs for providers are available at: XXX [LINK TO DOC AT FUTURENHS](#)

Key facts

- About 1 in 20 people will get bowel cancer during their lifetime.
- 10% of all colorectal cancers diagnosed via bowel screening. The bowel screening programme is aimed at earlier detection as colon cancer is slow growing and by detecting polyps and early cancers at early stage are curable.
- Bowel cancer screening is estimated to save around 2,400 lives per year.
- Around xx people die of bowel cancer every year
- In 2017/18 (this was still FOBT) 4.478m people were invited for bowel screening:

• Number of people diagnosed with cancer	2,962
• Number of people diagnosed with high risk adenomas	3,717
• Number of people diagnosed with intermediate risk adenomas	4,772
• Number of people diagnosed with low risk adenomas	7,289
• Number of people diagnosed with abnormal findings	9,524
• Number of people with a normal diagnostic outcome	5,063