

Colorectal Cancer Screening

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the colon or the rectum, also known as the large bowel or large intestine. Colorectal cancer can develop from abnormal tissue, called polyps that grow on the inner wall of the colon and rectum. Not all polyps are cancerous, but pre-cancerous polyps can be removed if caught early. This is why it is important to get screened at regular intervals so that the polyps are found and removed and do not turn into cancer.

Colorectal cancer often has no warning signs or symptoms until it is advanced. Common signs of colorectal cancer may include:

- Rectal bleeding
- Any sign of blood after bowel movements
- Diarrhea or constipation lasting for more than a few weeks
- Stool (poop) that is consistently more narrow than usual
- A feeling that you cannot completely empty your bowel
- Unexplained weight loss
- Tiredness or exhaustion

Who should be screened for colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer screening is recommended every 1 to 2 years for average risk people aged 50-74 years. If you're under 50 or over 74 years talk to your health care provider about the benefits and risks of screening.

You are considered at high risk of developing colorectal cancer if it is a part of your immediate family history. If you are considered high risk, you should begin screening at age 40 or ten years earlier than the youngest age that colorectal cancer was diagnosed in your family, whichever comes first.

But I'm healthy, why should I be screened?

In the Northwest Territories (NWT) colorectal cancer rates are higher than the rest of Canada, accounting for 20% of all cancers. Colorectal cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related death in the NWT, with death rates almost twice as high as the rest of Canada. Half of the colorectal cancer cases in the NWT are diagnosed in late/advanced stages, leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

Screening for colorectal cancer is the only way to find colorectal cancer early. Screening using a fecal immunochemical test (FIT) can detect colorectal cancer at an earlier stage. Cancers diagnosed in earlier stages are easier to treat than cancers found in advanced/late stages. Nine out of 10 colorectal cancer cases can be prevented or treated if found early.

For more information, to request a FIT, or to opt out of the territorial screening program, email CRCscreening@gov.nt.ca, call toll-free at 866-313-7989, option 6, contact your health care provider, or visit cancernwt.ca

About the FIT:

The Home Stool (Poop) Test

What is the FIT and how does it work?

The FIT is a home poop test to screen for colorectal cancer for persons of average risk. Cancerous tumors and other growths in the lining of the colon or rectum have blood vessels on their surface that can release a small amount of blood into the poop. The FIT can detect the small amount of blood that is not always visible to the eye.

How can I get the FIT?

The FIT is available across the NWT, talk with your healthcare provider about completing the test. The territorial colorectal cancer screening program may mail you a FIT kit directly to your mailbox or FIT kits are available at your local health centre or primary care clinic. Once you complete the FIT at home, return it to your local laboratory or health centre/cabin within 7 days.

How long do I have to do the FIT?

Each FIT has an expiry date on the collection container; do not use an expired collection container. Once you have collected the stool (poop) sample it needs to be returned to the laboratory or health centre/cabin within 7 days to be sent out for testing.

What do I need to do to prepare for a FIT?

There are no dietary restrictions, medication changes, or preparation required for the FIT.

How do I do the FIT?

The FIT comes with instructions and pictures showing how to complete the test, refer to these instructions.

What does a positive (abnormal) test result mean?

A positive (abnormal) FIT result means that blood was found in your poop, this doesn't necessarily mean you have colorectal cancer however additional investigations may be required. Your healthcare provider may recommend a colonoscopy which is a procedure that allows for a direct look inside of your colon and rectum to determine why blood was found in your stool.

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