

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme FAQs

We have put together some of the most common questions about bowel cancer screening. If you can't find the answer to any questions you have, please contact us on 707740 or refer to the links in this document where you can find further information.

What is Bowel Cancer Screening?

- Bowel cancer screening is one important way you can reduce your chances of developing bowel cancer – screening can spot the early stages and aims to prevent bowel cancers developing.
- Most bowel cancers start as non-cancerous fleshy growths (polyps) on the inside of the bowel which may develop into cancer over time. Bowel cancer often develops with few, if any, early warning symptoms.
- Bowel cancer screening can help find these polyps early, and by removing them reduces the risk of bowel cancer developing.

Why both men and women are offered bowel cancer screening?

- Bowel cancer affects both men and women though men are at a slightly higher risk.

Is screening important?

- Bowel cancer can often be prevented from developing through screening as it can identify it in the early stages when treatment is more likely to be effective.
- 9 out of 10 people survive bowel cancer if it's found and treated early.

What type of test is used to screen for bowel cancer?

- The Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) uses a chemical reaction to find human blood in a sample of stool (poo) so it can detect blood even when it is not visible to the naked eye.
- A kit will be sent to you with clear instructions.

Who will be offered bowel cancer screening?

- All residents of the Bailiwick of Guernsey aged between 60 and 70 years old who are registered with a local GP and hold a valid GY number. If you are 71 and over, you can still take a bowel cancer screening test every 2 years. However, you need to contact the Bowel Screening Programme on 70740 to request a test kit.

How often will I be offered screening?

- You will automatically receive an invitation letter and a screening kit through the post every two years.

How do I receive my FIT kit?

- You will automatically receive an invitation letter, FIT kit and instructions on how to collect a sample and an information leaflet by post.
- If you think you have been missed please ring 707740 and ask.

How do I use the FIT kit?

- The sample is collected in the privacy of your home.
- Your invitation letter will contain instructions on how to collect your sample.

FIT kit instructions can also be accessed via <https://www.gov.gg/screening>

What do I do after I collect my sample?

After you have collected your sample, just post it to the PEH laboratory using the pre-paid envelope provided in your pack.

What happens if I lose the pre-paid envelope?

- You can drop your sample off to pathology department or the porters lodge at the PEH.
- Alternatively, you can ring the bowel cancer screening office on 707740 for more information.

What happens after I have posted my sample?

- Once you post your kit back, the laboratory will analyse your sample.
- You and your GP will be notified of the results by post within 10 working days.

What if my screening result is negative?

- A negative result means that human blood was not found in your stool (poo). There is nothing for you to do.
- You will automatically be sent another letter and test kit every two years' until after your 71th birthday. Beyond 70, you will not be automatically invited but you can self-refer.

What if my screening result is positive?

- ***If there is any blood in your stool (poo) sample, it's a sign that further investigation is needed. It doesn't necessarily mean you have bowel cancer.***
- A positive result means that human blood was found in your stool (poo).
- You will be sent an appointment to see a specialist nurse at the hospital, who will explain the results and any further tests that might be recommended and you will be able to ask any questions you might have.

What follow-up tests will I need to have if my result is positive?

- In most cases, you will be offered a colonoscopy, which is a visual examination of the bowel using a fibre optic endoscope (thin, flexible tube) with a camera on the end.
- The procedure will be fully explained – including the necessary preparation – and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions.
- A colonoscopy can detect inflamed tissue, ulcers and abnormal growths (polyps) in addition to bowel cancer.
- There are also other diagnostic tests that the nurse will discuss with you at your appointment if they are more appropriate.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

- Colonoscopies are carried out in the PEH by a consultant and involves passing a thin, flexible tube (with a camera on the end) into your bowel so the inside of your bowel can be seen on a screen to find where the blood may be coming from. **A colonoscopy will only be performed if your consultant thinks it is needed.**

What if the consultant sees a growth (polyp) during a colonoscopy?

- A consultant can remove polyps, during a colonoscopy and have them tested for signs of cancer. Polyps are common in adults and are usually harmless.
- However, most bowel cancers begin as a polyp, so removing polyps early is an effective way to prevent cancer developing.
- The polyps or biopsies (tiny pieces of tissue) are sent to the laboratory for testing and the results will be discussed at a Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting to decide on any recommended further treatment or follow up.

How will I know the results of my colonoscopy?

- You will be given a report to take home with you, and a letter will be sent to you and your GP within two weeks of your colonoscopy.

What if my colonoscopy is normal?

- If the result of your colonoscopy is normal, you will return to regular screening approximately four years after the date of your colonoscopy as long as you remain eligible. You will not have to do anything.
- You will automatically receive a letter and kit when you are scheduled for your next screening.

Should I take part in screening if I don't have any bowel symptoms?

Yes, definitely. The beauty of bowel cancer screening is that it can pick up polyps and early cancers before they cause symptoms. Taking part in bowel cancer screening is one of the best ways to protect yourself against developing bowel cancer.

I am currently undergoing treatment for a different cancer, should I complete the kit?

- People who are currently having some form of cancer treatment should in the first instance seek advice from their oncologist (cancer doctor) before completing the kit. Your GP will also be able to advise you. You can also email bowelcancerscreening@gov.gg or call 707740 for advice.

I take care of the toilet needs of an infirm/disabled person - can I help them to use the kit?

- If the person has asked for help, understands the screening process (including colonoscopy), and does not have a medical condition that means they shouldn't be screened, then yes, you can assist them to use the kit.

I take care of someone without the mental capacity to make their own decisions about screening - how should I deal with their invitation?

- If the person you care for is unable to make their own decisions about screening, then you, as their carer, can make what is called a 'best interests' decision on their behalf, in the same way as you may be making other decisions about their care and treatment.
- Whether you are a carer, family member or close friend, the process is the same. You may find it helpful to speak to the person's GP or other family members to discuss the test before making a decision.
- You will need to weigh up the benefits of screening, the possible harm to them and what you think the person would have wanted to do themselves.

More Information and advice

If you have any questions about the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme or would like to leave any feedback, please contact the bowel cancer screening programme by:

- email – bowelcancerscreening@gov.gg
- phone - 707740 (Open Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm)
- post – Bowel Cancer Screening Programme, Princess Elizabeth Hospital, Le Vauquiedor, St Martin, Guernsey GY4 6UU.

Useful links

- www.bowelcancerguernsey.org
- www.gov.gg/screening
- www.gov.gg/healthyliving
- www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/bowel-cancer

We have also produced the leaflets below accessible from www.gov.gg/screening

- An information leaflet which describes the bowel cancer screening procedure.
- A colonoscopy leaflet which details what a colonoscopy is and how it is carried out.