

When you will receive a screening invitation

The bowel cancer screening programme was paused in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Screening colonoscopy services were reintroduced by Trusts from June 2020, for those who had had a positive screening result and were on a waiting list for this investigation.

Routine invitations for bowel cancer screening started again from week commencing 17th August 2020, beginning with those who were due to be sent a test at end March 2020. All routine invites will continue to be delayed by approximately five months until the programme has the capacity to catch up.

Completing your screening test kit

When you receive your test kit, you should follow the instructions of how to collect your sample and return it to the laboratory in the envelope provided.

The test used within the bowel cancer screening programme has recently changed. The new test is called a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT). This test is easier to use and is better at detecting individuals who require further investigations.

Please post your completed test kit it as soon as possible. Delays in returning your kit may prevent the sample from being processed. You should receive your screening test result within 2 weeks.

What to do while you wait for your screening invite

While you wait for your invite it is important to be symptom aware. If you are concerned about symptoms of bowel cancer you should seek advice from your doctor. Symptoms may include:

- unexplained bleeding/blood in your stools
- a change in bowel habit
- pain or swelling in your abdomen
- unexplained weight loss
- unexplained tiredness.

Your safety if you need further investigations

If your screening test shows traces of blood in your bowel motion, you will be asked to contact the freephone helpline on 0800 015 2514. Appointments with the Specialist Screening Practitioner (nurse) have mostly moved to telephone appointments. A suitable time for the nurse to call you will be arranged by the helpline staff.

The Specialist Screening Practitioner will assess your fitness for further investigations and will advise you on all the measures the Trust is taking to keep you and their staff safe at this time. The Trust will advise you of all safety requirements and instructions for attending your investigation.

When attending the hospital for any investigations you will be asked to wear a face covering, you may be asked to attend alone and you may have to wait outside until the time of your appointment.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus, or have been in contact with someone who does, you must **not** go to your colonoscopy appointment. Contact the Trust and let them know you have coronavirus symptoms. Your appointment can be rearranged for a time after you have isolated.

‘Taking the test could save your life’

Bowel cancer is a significant cause of ill health and premature death. Over 1,000 people every year in Northern Ireland are diagnosed with the disease and over 400 will die. Symptoms often develop late in the disease, leaving limited scope for treatment and potential cure. If detected at a very early stage bowel cancer treatment can be 90% successful.



The bowel cancer screening programme, which allows early detection and treatment, significantly improves outcomes for those with the disease which will save approximately 60 lives a year.

Bowel cancer screening is the third cancer based screening programme in Northern Ireland, following breast cancer and cervical cancer screening. It is the only cancer screening programme in Northern Ireland to include men.

The bowel cancer screening programme started in Northern Ireland in 2010 and it is for people who have no signs or symptoms of bowel cancer. The programme covers all of Northern Ireland. All people aged between 60 and 74 registered with a GP are automatically sent a screening kit every two years.

The bowel cancer screening programme involves the use of a home testing kit to collect a sample of bowel motion. Completed tests kits are returned to a laboratory which looks for traces of blood in the sample. Blood indicates that further investigations, usually a colonoscopy, are required.

For further information on bowel cancer screening please see:

[Bowel cancer screening: the facts](#)

[Bowel cancer screening: how to take the test](#)

[Bowel cancer screening: the next step](#)

[Cancer Research UK animated video on how to complete the bowel screening test in NI](#)

[Bowel cancer screening | nidirect](#)

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