

# The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme in England (NHSBCSP)

**FREEPHONE HELPLINE**

**0800 707 6060**

SCREENING

**Q** Who is included in the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme?

**A** Men and women aged 60-69 are sent a home testing kit every two years. The Programme is currently being extended to invite men and women aged 70 to their 75th birthday, with over half of England covered so far. People over the screening invitation age can request a kit every two years by calling the helpline number above.

**Q** If a patient of bowel screening age presents with significant lower GI symptoms, should they be told to wait until they are sent a kit by the NHSBCSP?

**A** No. If a patient of bowel screening age presents with significant lower GI symptoms, they should be referred for investigation as an urgent referral for suspected cancer in-line with NICE cancer referral guidelines. Screening is not intended to investigate symptoms, and is not available 'on demand' for this purpose.

**Q** How are GPs involved in the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme?

**A** GPs are not directly involved in the delivery of the NHSBCSP other than the need to ensure that the GP registration record has the patient's current address. All practices will receive a copy of the results letter sent to patients and will be notified of those who did not respond to the screening invitation.

**Q** What is the uptake of the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme like so far?

**A** Average uptake in England is just less than 55%. Uptake is slightly lower in men than for women and the poorest uptake is amongst lower socio-economic groups and ethnic minority communities<sup>1</sup>.

**Q** How can GPs support the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme?

**A** GPs can encourage people of screening age to look out for the test kit and make the choice to complete it and point out that participation could save them from a late diagnosis and poor prognosis.

**Q** What is flexible sigmoidoscopy screening?

**A** The NHS is developing a pilot for flexible sigmoidoscopy (flexi-sig) screening for all men and women when they reach the age of 55. This follows a multicentre randomised controlled trial<sup>2</sup> which found that flexible sigmoidoscopy was a safe and practical test which when offered only once to the appropriate age group conferred a substantial and lasting benefit. It is a one-off test, which aims to detect bowel polyps and cancers early before any symptoms develop.

The flexi-sig test will be an addition to the existing NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme, and will be offered to people aged 55.

More information for health professionals, and instructions on how to complete the bowel screening kit can be found on the NHS Cancer Screening website: [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel)

1. Weller, D et al. 2006. English Pilot of Bowel Cancer Screening: an evaluation of the second round. Accessed October 2011. <http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/pilot-2nd-round-evaluation.pdf>

2. Hol, L et al. 2010. Screening for colorectal cancer: randomised trial comparing guaiac-based and immunochemical faecal occult blood testing and flexible sigmoidoscopy. *Gut*.59, vol 1, p62-8.