

Frequently asked questions: Bowel cancer

1. How do people who do not have Medicare get access to the bowel cancer screening test (FOBT or at-home test)?

Refugees and those who do not have a Medicare card will not receive the free at-home test/FOBT through the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. If they have any symptoms or would like to do the FOBT, they should go to their community health centre and ask a doctor about this.

2. Should people who have haemorrhoids test for bowel cancer through the at-home test/FOBT?

It depends on if the haemorrhoid is bleeding. If it is bleeding, then the test should not be completed and they should seek advice from their doctor. If the haemorrhoid isn't bleeding, then the test can be completed at home.

Regarding any visible blood – this means the patient is symptomatic (and screening is only for asymptomatic people). The patient may believe the blood is due to a haemorrhoid but it may be due to other reasons. That's why anyone who has blood visible in their poo/the toilet bowl should not complete the FOBT, and instead are encouraged to see their doctor.

3. Where can I find a video on how to do the at-home test/FOBT?

Video on how to do the at-home bowel cancer screening test/FOBT in different languages (this site also has the invitation letter, that is sent out with the FOBT, translated in different languages):

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/using-the-bowel-screening-home-test-kit-other-languages>

4. What number do I call if my at-home test/FOBT never arrived or I need to order a new one?

Please call the National Bowel Cancer Screening hotline: 1800 627 701.

5. Why are people over the age of 74 years not sent the free kit? What if someone older than 74 wants to screen? Can they screen for free?

Population screening programs should offer more benefit than harm to the target population. In Australia, screening in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is offered to eligible people aged between 50 and 74. This is consistent with other international bowel cancer screening programs. The upper age limit of 74 years is based on consideration of relative risk of bowel cancer in people over 74 years of age who are asymptomatic, and the risk to these individuals associated with screening – particularly from follow-up diagnostic procedures (colonoscopy).

Individuals, over the age of 74, who would like to screen, can speak to their GP on what this would cost them (rates can vary).

6. FOBT kit comes via post. If someone left it in the post box for few weeks, will the results be accurate? Do they need to request a new kit?

The FOBT should be okay if it is left in the post for a few days BEFORE the sample is collected. Once the sample is collected then the FOBT should be kept in a refrigerator and mailed immediately (at the end of the day so that it is not sitting at the bottom of a mailbox for an entire day). If the results are affected or the test is done incorrectly then the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program will send you a letter to do the test again.

7. Do people doing the FOBT need to follow a certain diet before doing the test (such as not eating red meat for 2 days)?

No, the at-home FOBT does not require you to undertake any special diet before completing the test. All you need to do is follow the instructions that are mailed with the test.