



# All about bowel screening

[timetobowelscreen.nz](https://timetobowelscreen.nz)

**Health New Zealand**  
Te Whatu Ora

**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government



National  
Bowel  
Screening  
Programme

This booklet has information on bowel cancer and bowel screening, to help you decide whether to take part in the free National Bowel Screening Programme.

## Bowel screening



- It's free.
- The test is quick and easy to do at home.
- A test kit is delivered to you every two years.
- It's for people aged 60-74 years.

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of bowel cancer in the world.

Bowel cancer often has no symptoms. The bowel screening test helps find bowel cancer early, when it can often be successfully treated. It can detect tiny traces of blood in your bowel motion (poo), which may be an early warning sign that something is wrong.

Data from our programme shows that the bowel screening test will find at least 7 out of 10 cancers that are present. Bowel cancers do not bleed all the time, so sometimes a cancer can be missed. Bowel cancer may also start to develop between screening tests. For these reasons it's important to have bowel screening every two years and talk to your doctor straight away if you have any bowel cancer symptoms.

Common symptoms of bowel cancer may include:

- a change in your normal bowel habit that continues for several weeks.
- blood in your poo.

Although these symptoms are usually caused by other conditions, it's important to get them checked by your doctor.

## How screening works

### This simple test could save your life!

A bowel screening test kit will be sent to your home. Do the test as soon as you can. If you don't do the test within six months, the kit will expire and you'll need to do another test.

The bowel screening test is easy to do.

- You take a small sample of your bowel motion (poo), using the stick provided. You put the stick into the tube, and mail it back in the pre-paid envelope.
- Simple instructions on how to do the test will be with your kit.
- Try to post your sample back on the day you do it, or the next day.

## Your results

You will get your results within three weeks of returning your test.

You will get a letter about your results, and may also be contacted by your doctor or nurse.

If you don't get your results within three weeks, please call us on 0800 924 432 or email [info@bowelscreening.health.nz](mailto:info@bowelscreening.health.nz)

### Negative test result

If your test result is negative, you do not need to do anything more now. Make sure you do your next test when it is sent to you in two years' time.

See your doctor straight away if you have symptoms such as a change in your normal bowel habit that continues for several weeks, or blood in your bowel motion (poo) - don't wait until your next screening test.

### Positive test result

If your test is positive, it means you will need a further investigation. This will usually be a colonoscopy.

A positive test result does not necessarily mean you have bowel cancer.

More information on positive test results can be found at [timetobowelscreen.nz](http://timetobowelscreen.nz)

## The bowel screening test is not right for everyone

If you can tick any of these boxes talk to your doctor or call us free on **0800 924 432**. Bowel screening may not be right for you.

☐ I have one of the common symptoms of bowel cancer - see your doctor straight away.

☐ I have had a colonoscopy within the last 5 years. Please call so we can invite you again in the future.

☐ I am on a bowel polyp or bowel cancer surveillance programme.

☐ I have had bowel cancer or am currently being treated for bowel cancer.

☐ I have had my large bowel removed.

☐ I have active ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease.

## What is bowel cancer?

- Bowel cancer is also called colon, rectal or colorectal cancer.
- Your bowel is part of the food digestive system. It is made up of the small bowel, the large bowel (colon) and the rectum.
- Bowel cancer starts when cells in the bowel begin to grow out of control.
- The cells can turn into a polyp (growth) and some polyps may turn into a cancer over a number of years.
- It can take a long time before the cancer grows and spreads to other parts of the body.
- Regular bowel screening, for people who are not experiencing any bowel symptoms, provides an opportunity to find and treat bowel cancer at an early stage.

## For more information

- Go to **timetobowelscreen.nz**
- Free phone **0800 924 432**,  
Monday to Friday 8am-6pm
- Email **info@bowelscreening.health.nz**

For information on eligibility for publicly funded health services see the Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora website or call **0800 924 432**.

## Other languages and formats

This pamphlet is also available in accessible formats and in the following languages:

Te Reo Māori, Cook Islands, Samoan, Fijian, Rotuman, Kiribati, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Niuean, Tokelauan, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Punjabi, Tagalog, Arabic and Burmese.

Scan the QR code or go to **timetobowelscreen.nz**

