

For cascade to Primary Care via:

- Primary Cancer Leads
- Cancer Alliances

Email: josephine.ruwende@nhs.net

Dear GP colleague

11th June 2021

Re: The expansion of the home testing (FIT kit) programme

I am writing to make you aware of changes that are being made to the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme (BCSP).

From April 2021, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) expanded the population eligible to receive a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) as part of the NHS BCSP to include 50-59 year olds. This age extension will meet a key commitment of the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 to modernise the programme and ensure alignment with the government commitments to improve earlier diagnosis of cancer.

The age extension will be gradually rolled out across the country in a phased approach over the next four years:

- Year 1 56 year olds
- Year 2 58 year olds
- Year 3 54 year olds
- Year 4 52 & 50 year olds

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Age	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
60-74	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)
58		Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)
56	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)
54			Invite (FIT 120)	Invite (FIT 120)
52				Invite (FIT 120)
50				Invite (FIT 120)

Following expert clinical advice and engagement with stakeholders including the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC), Ministers made the decision that NHSE/I should decommission Bowel Scope Screening in December 2020.

Since FIT was introduced into the NHS BCSP in 2019 uptake has increased by 7% in London, with the largest increases in uptake among groups with low participation rates, such as men, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and people in more deprived areas.

NHSE/I continues to work closely with partners on plans to further strengthen the programme and increase informed uptake, in line with Professor Sir Mike Richards' [Review of adult screening services](#).

If you have any queries, please email Josephine.ruwende@nhs.net.

Yours Sincerely

Josephine Ruwende,
Consultant Lead and Screening and Immunisation Lead
NHSE/I & PHE London Region

Questions and Answers

What is a FIT kit?

The Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) detects traces of human blood in stool samples. The test is simple to use and can be done at home. It is now being used as the primary test in the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme.

Is a FIT kit better than a Bowel Scope?

One test is not better than the other, however uptake of bowel scope screening was lower than expected. The FIT test kit is a simpler and safer test, done at home. Only a small proportion (about 2-3%) of people who use the kit will need further tests. The FIT kit is also universally rolled out across England which is an important part of reducing health inequalities across the country.

What plans are in place to extend the age cohort for the NHSEI bowel cancer screening programme?

We will be lowering the age range of the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme to include 50 to 59-year olds as stated in the NHS Long Term Plan. To do this safely, the age extension will be gradually rolled out across the country in a phased approach over the next four years, starting with expanding the programme to include 56-year olds in 2021.

Will everyone aged between 50 and 59 get their FIT test sent through at the same time? Will there be different rollout dates in different parts of the country?

The age extension will be gradually rolled out across the country in a phased approach over the next four years. Based on modelling and clinical advice, this is to allow for a safe and effective roll out in line with capacity and to ensure people can access further tests if required. Not everybody will receive their FIT kit in the same year and there will be some regional variation for rollout dates.

How will I know when I'm eligible?

People will receive a programme invitation letter when they become eligible for bowel cancer screening. They will then receive the FIT kit with full instructions and prepaid return packaging 2 weeks later.

Who should I contact if I haven't had my test?

Eligible people are invited automatically by the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. People who are concerned that they may have missed their invitation can call the free bowel cancer screening helpline for advice on 0800 707 60 60. Relay UK is also available - dial 18001 then 0800 707 60 60 from your textphone or the Relay UK app.

Why was the decision taken to decommission bowel scope screening?

There are a range of reasons, in discussion with experts and stakeholders, that informed the decision including:

- Bowel Scope screening was only available in certain parts of the country creating variation in service delivery and people taking up the offer of the test was lower than expected.
- To continue to ensure that people who complete a FIT kit and require further diagnostic tests receive them in a timely way and, following the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, to maintain focus on fully restoring the FIT testing programme.

- Bowel Scope screening is not provided in our devolved nations, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Decommissioning Bowel Scope screening will support the extension of the FIT home testing programme, which was a key NHS commitment. This decision was also supported by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

What happens to the people who were invited for a Bowel Scope screening when this is no longer being offered?

All those in this group who were offered a Bowel Scope and accepted the offer, received a letter in January 2021 informing them they would be sent a FIT kit from April 2021. Screening hubs have been readied to ensure this group is prioritised for a FIT test before age extension is mobilised.

I was 56 in April 2021, can I have a screening kit?

If the local screening centre has commenced age extension, people aged 56 from April 2021 will receive an invitation to be screened at some point throughout the year until April 2022. If you are experiencing any symptoms of bowel cancer, we recommend speaking to your GP.

Where can I find this information in one place?

Information on bowel cancer and the Screening Programme can be found on <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening/>.

I'm aged over 60 and I've been waiting for my bowel screening FIT kit, which has been delayed because of COVID-19; why are you starting this new system now when people in the current system are still waiting?

During the coronavirus outbreak, NHS Bowel Cancer Screening providers took the decision locally to reschedule appointments for diagnostic tests to a later date to redeploy staff to support coronavirus-related work and protect patients from the virus and to pause routine invitations. Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, we have made significant progress in restarting and clearing the screening backlog and routine invitations.

Extending the age cohort for the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme was a key commitment made in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#). We are committed to delivering age extension in a safe and phased approach in line with our capacity, whilst we continue to work through the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I did not take up the invitation for a Bowel Scope screening, but I would like a FIT kit, how can I get one?

People will receive a programme invitation letter when they become eligible for bowel cancer screening. They will then receive the FIT kit with full instructions and prepaid return packaging 2 weeks later.

People who are concerned that they may have missed their invitation can call the free bowel cancer screening helpline for advice on 0800 707 60 60. Relay UK is also available - dial 18001 then 0800 707 60 60 from your textphone or the Relay UK app.

If you are experiencing any symptoms of bowel cancer, please contact your GP.