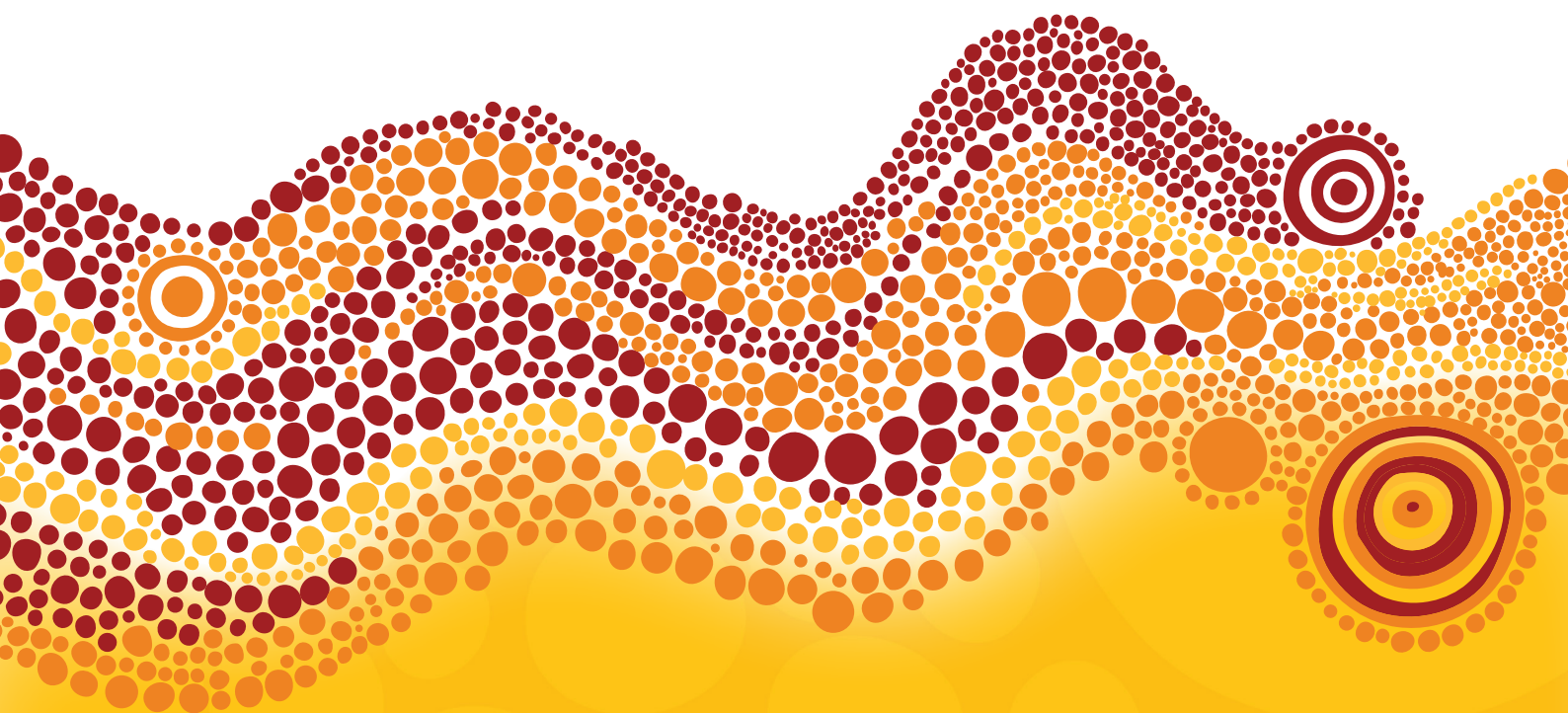




NACCHO
National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation

A Guide for Community Members

**Frequently asked questions about
bowel cancer screening**



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For many people, bowel cancer is a topic that is often not spoken about. However, it is important that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people between the ages of 50- and 74-years screen for bowel cancer every two years to stay healthy for their family and community.

This information has been developed to help answer questions you may have about bowel cancer and bowel cancer screening. If you have other questions, want more information or help completing the test speak with your health care professional or local medical service.

What you need to know about bowel cancer

What is the risk of developing bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the risk increasing over the age of 50. Bowel cancer is a preventable cancer and if caught early, bowel cancer can be successfully treated in more than 90% of cases.

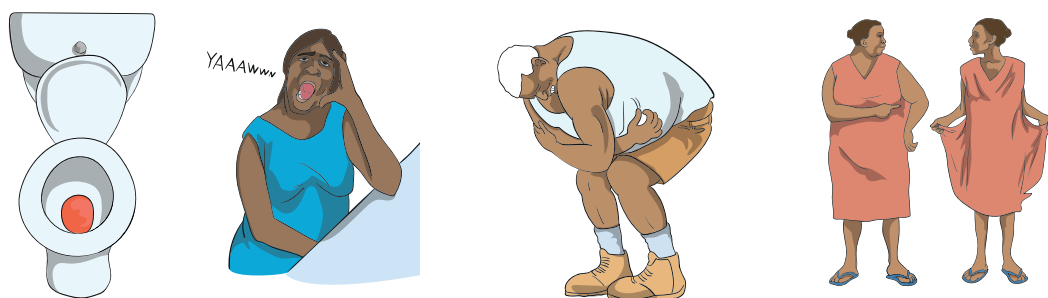
In 2019, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participated in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program at much lower rates compared to the general population. A trial program delivered kits through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), resulted in higher rates of screening.

What are the signs of bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer can develop without any obvious signs, this is why it is very important community members keep up to date with screening. For people with signs of bowel cancer, bowel cancer screening is not recommended. Signs of bowel cancer can include:

- blood in your poo or in the toilet bowl
- a change in your poo
- severe constipation, and/or if you need to poo more often than usual
- feeling tired
- weight loss for no reason
- stomach pain.

If you have any of these signs, speak with your health care professional as soon as possible.



What you need to know about bowel cancer screening

I feel fine, and I don't have any signs, why should I screen for bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer can develop without any obvious signs. It is important to keep up to date with screening even if you feel healthy. Screening every two years is recommended for eligible people aged between 50 and 74 years old.

I have a family history of bowel cancer, should I screen?

People with a family history of bowel cancer should talk with a health care professional.

People are at higher risk of bowel cancer if:

- A close relative (parent, brother, sister, or child) developed bowel cancer at a young age (under 55 years); or
- More than one close relative (parent, brother, sister, or child) in your family has had bowel cancer at any age.

If you have a significant family history of bowel cancer, it is important to speak to a health care professional as they can provide advice on how to prevent bowel cancer. More than 75% of people with bowel cancer do not have a family history.

I have an existing medical condition, should I screen?

Some medical conditions such as urinary tract infections (UTIs) and renal disease can lead to blood in the urine. This may give a false positive result because traces of blood could be found in the poo samples which may not be related to bowel cancer. If you have an existing medical condition this should be discussed with a health care professional before screening for bowel cancer. Health care professionals and local medical services are best placed to provide advice.

It is recommended you don't do the test if you have:

- piles (haemorrhoids) which are bleeding. If this happens, see your health care professional
- blood in your urine or blood in the toilet bowl. If this happens, see your health care professional
- your menstrual period. Wait for 3 days after your period finishes before doing the test
- had a recent colonoscopy.

I have an existing bowel condition, should I still participate in bowel cancer screening?

It is best to talk with a health care professional if you have had problems with your bowel before, particularly if the condition has been active in the last 12 months or is currently under treatment.

You may not need to participate in screening if you:

- have had a bowel condition in the last 12 months which is currently under treatment; or
- have had a recent colonoscopy (anytime in the last 2 years).

If you are scheduled for a colonoscopy, it is best to discuss your participation in the screening program with your health care professional. If your health care professional recommends you do not need to screen, you, or your health care professional can 'opt out' or delay participating in the program through the National Cancer Screening Register by contacting **1800 627 701** or at www.ncsr.gov.au.





What you need to know about bowel cancer screening kits

How do I access a bowel cancer screening kit?

If you are between 50 and 74 years and have your contact details registered with Medicare, you may receive a bowel cancer testing kit in the mail every two years from the age of 50.

From October 2022, eligible community members will receive kits directly from their ACCHO or health care professional.

If you over 50 years of age and have yet to receive a bowel cancer testing kit in the mail, you can request a kit directly from a health care professional.

What to do if I threw out/lost/misplaced my kit?

You can contact your local medical service or health care professional who issues test kits to request a replacement kit. You can also receive a free replacement kit by contacting the National Cancer Screening Register at www.ncsr.gov.au or calling **1800 627 701**.

What does the screening kit test for?

The test is called 'immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT)'. It looks for traces of blood in your poo which you can't often see. There are several reasons why blood could be found in your poo:

- Polyps (abnormal tissue growth on the bowel)
- Haemorrhoids (veins that are swollen or inflamed)
- Inflammation in the bowel.

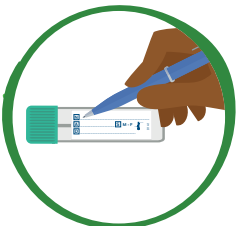
You and your health care professional will be notified of your result. A positive bowel cancer screening result means blood was found in your poo. It is not a cancer diagnosis. It is advised to see your health care professional to find out why there is blood in your poo. Steps will be taken to ensure you receive support and medical advice on actions that need to be taken to investigate further.

How do I use the kit?

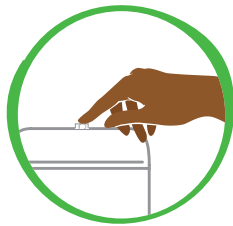
The test is quick and simple. Below are steps to help guide you through doing the test:

- The test can be done in the privacy of your own home
- Open the test kit and make sure it contains: 2 x toilet liners, 2x test tubes, sealed zip lock bag, reply paid envelope and 'Participant Details Form'
- Complete the 'Participant Details Form' by ensuring you write the sample dates and sign the form once completed
- On the collection test tubes write your name, date of birth and date you collected your samples
- Do a wee flush the toilet before doing a poo
- Place the flushable toilet liner with the writing side up into the toilet bowl
- Collect a tiny sample (the size of a grain of rice) from the poo and place it into one of the sample tubes using the stick that is attached to the test tube lid
- Place the test tube sample into the zip lock bag and put into the fridge (the sample will not contaminate any food items in the fridge because it is sealed)
- Samples should ideally be kept refrigerated, not frozen
- Repeat for the next sample, ideally no more than 2-3 days apart
- If it takes longer than 14 days from the first sample is taken to when the laboratory receives the completed test, you may be asked to complete another test
- Once both samples have been collected, put the samples along with the completed and signed 'Participant Details Form' inside the reply-paid envelope and take to an Australia Post Office or post box
- If possible, post the samples within 24 hours of your last sample
- It is important to keep the samples cool when transporting to a post box or Australia Post Office
- Alternatively, if it is challenging to keep your samples cool or drop them to a post box, talk to your health care professional for additional support about storing and posting samples.

PREPARE



Write on tube label



First do a wee and flush



Then put liner in toilet

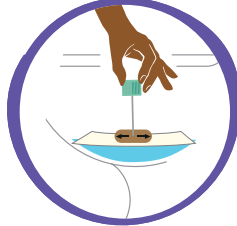
COLLECT



Do a poo on the liner



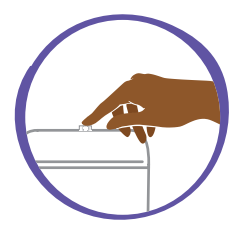
Open tube, pull out collection stick



Drag stick through poo



Put stick back in tube till it clicks



Flush toilet and wash hands

STORE & REPEAT

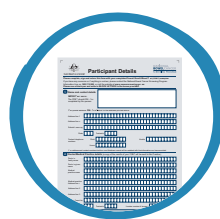


Place tube in bag
Put sample in fridge

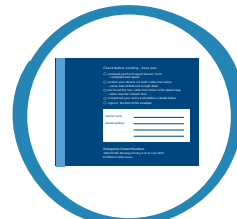


Next poo, repeat with second tube

POST YOUR SAMPLE



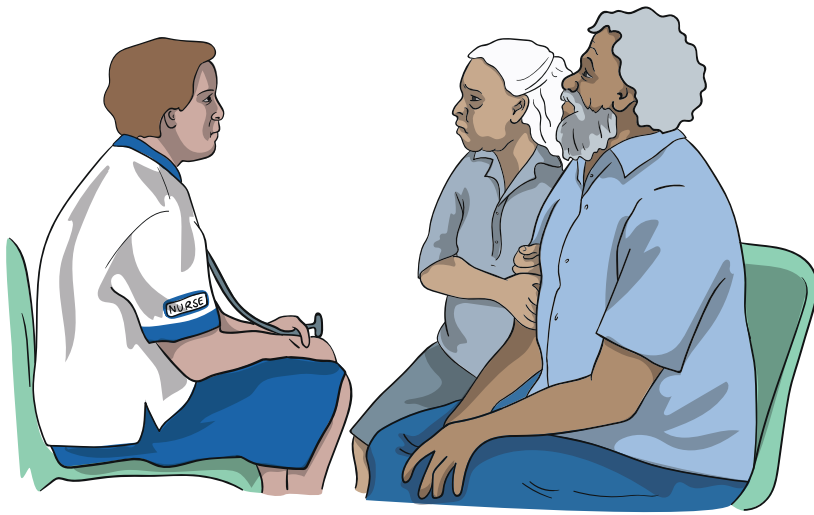
Complete the participant details form – make sure you sign it



Fill out the reply-paid envelope



Post the samples as soon as you can



What you need to know about test results

What happens after I do the test?

You will be mailed your test results about four weeks after the samples have been posted. If a test result is positive, this means blood has been found in a sample, this does not mean a cancer diagnosis. If the result is negative, you should do the test again in two years.

If your health care professional provided you with the bowel cancer screening kit, a copy of your results will also be sent to them. They may follow up with you to discuss the results.

What does it mean if my test is positive

A positive result is not a cancer diagnosis. Blood can be found in the poo sample for several reasons. It is important to speak with your health care professional so they can investigate further, preferably within two weeks of receiving your result.

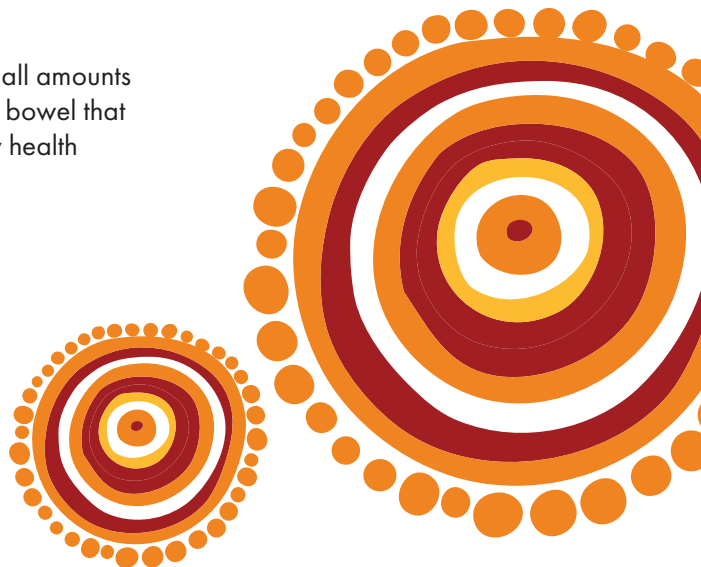
What does a negative test result mean?

A negative test result means that no blood was detected in the poo samples. You will automatically be invited to test again in two years.

The screening tests are very sensitive and accurate, however if you experience stomach pain or a change in your bowels even after a negative test result, it is important to see your health care professional as soon as possible.

How accurate are bowel cancer screening tests?

The iFOBT test is a widely available and well trialled test to detect small amounts of blood in the poo, which can be a sign of cancer or changes in the bowel that can lead to cancer. The iFOBT is the screening tool recommended by health professional experts.



Other important information to know

Are the bowel cancer test kits temperature sensitive?

The bowel cancer test kit itself is not sensitive to temperature. However, heat can impact the completed kits containing samples need to be kept cool for as long as possible. When samples are exposed to temperatures of 30 degrees or above for long periods of time, the samples may produce an incorrect or inconclusive result.

What is a hot zone area?

A hot zone is a postcode area with a monthly average temperature above 30°C. The hot-zone policy primarily impacts areas of the Northern Territory, North Queensland, and Western Australia¹. This is important to consider if you or a family member are participating the bowel cancer screening program.

I live in a hot zone area; can I still do the test?

If you live in a hot zone area talk to your health care professional before doing the test. You can still complete a bowel cancer screening test. Here are some important tips:

- Read the test kit instructions carefully before completing the test
- Access to a refrigerator or cold storage to store the two samples is strongly recommended
- Access to an insulated container or esky if you need to carry collected samples to a post box over a long distance
- Hand the reply-paid envelope with completed samples into an Australia Post office or if possible, drop into a post box within an airconditioned area
- Try to avoid posting the reply-paid envelope in an outside post box, if this is not an option, place the reply-paid envelope in the post box as close to the collection time as possible (the collection time is usually displayed on the post box).

If accessing an Australia Post Office is challenging for you and your family, or you have limited access to cold storage, discuss with your health care professional. They may be able to help store and post your samples.

Do the test kits have an expiry date?

Yes, each kit has an approximate 7-month expiry, this date can be found on the back of the kit envelope.

¹ While Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide have days where the temperature reaches over 40°C for days or weeks at a time, they are not subject to mail restrictions as they do not have monthly averages higher than 30°C.

