

# ColonCancerCheck

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## What is ColonCancerCheck?

In January 2007, the Ontario government, in collaboration with Cancer Care Ontario, introduced ColonCancerCheck – the first population-based provincial colorectal cancer screening program in Canada. The goal of ColonCancerCheck is to decrease mortality from colorectal cancer through early detection and treatment.

## What is colorectal cancer?

Colon cancer develops in the large intestine. It generally develops from tiny growths inside the colon called polyps. Over time, some polyps can become cancerous. Colon cancer is cancer of the large intestine (colon), the lower part of your digestive system. Rectal cancer is cancer of the last 6 inches of the colon.

Together, they are referred to as colorectal cancer. The ColonCancerCheck program screens for both colon and rectal cancer.

## How common is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer in Canada, and Ontario has one of the highest rates of colorectal cancer in the world. In 2007, an estimated 3,250 died from the disease and 7,800 Ontarians were newly diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

## What causes colorectal cancer?

The exact cause is hard to pinpoint. However, it is known that tiny growths called polyps sometimes form on the inner surface of your colon or rectum. Polyps are not cancerous to start with and some may never become cancer. But over time, the slow growing polyps can become a cancerous tumour.

## What are the signs and symptoms I should watch for?

Colorectal cancer often doesn't give us any clues of its presence inside us. During the early stages of the disease there are no symptoms. Regular screening is the best way to detect colorectal cancer early. As colorectal cancer progresses the following symptoms may occur:

- A change in your bowel movements
- Blood (either bright red or very dark) in your stool (feces)
- Diarrhea, constipation or feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Stools that are narrower than usual
- Stomach discomfort
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Vomiting

If you have one or more of the above symptoms it may not be colorectal cancer, but you need to check it out without delay by speaking to your health care provider.



### **What are the screening methods?**

There are various methods of screening for colorectal cancer. The screening methods that are part of the ColonCancerCheck program are:

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)** a simple, self-administered test that can be done in the privacy of your own home. It can detect the presence of trace amounts of blood in your stool. A positive test result doesn't necessarily mean that you have colorectal cancer but does require follow-up to find out if you do have colorectal cancer. Approximately 10% of people with a positive FOBT are found to have cancer during a follow-up colonoscopy. It is recommended that everyone 50 years and older should be screened with an FOBT every two years.
- **Colonoscopy** is an examination of the lining of your rectum and colon using a long flexible tube with a camera on the end. It is recommended for individuals at increased risk, such as those who have one or more close relatives (parent, sibling or child) who had colorectal cancer and those with a positive FOBT result.

### **Will taking the Fecal Occult Blood Test cost me anything?**

No, there is no cost to take the test.

### **What is a health care provider?**

A health care provider is a regulated professional who provides you with primary health care, such as a family physician or nurse practitioner.

### **I don't have a health care provider, how do I get screened?**

If you don't have a health care provider you can speak to a [representative from the ColonCancerCheck program](#) who will provide you with details on how to get screened.

### **How do I protect myself from getting colorectal cancer?**

You will reduce your risk of getting colorectal cancer, as well as many other diseases, if you lead a healthy lifestyle, including a diet filled with lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. It will also help if you watch your weight, don't smoke, and don't drink alcohol excessively. It is also very important to be screened regularly for colorectal cancer.

### **When should I start screening for colorectal cancer?**

It's recommended that if you are 50 years of age or older, without a family history of colorectal cancer, you should be screened for the disease using an easy-to-use Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) every two years.

### **What do I do if I have a family history of colorectal cancer?**

You have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer if you have a family history of the disease in a first degree family member (parent, sibling, child). It is recommended that you get screened using colonoscopy at age 50 or 10 years earlier than the age of the diagnosis of your parent or sibling.

### **What difference will regular FOBT screening make?**

Studies show that screening with an FOBT every two years reduced death from colorectal cancer by 16 per cent over a decade. When caught early through regular screening, there is a 90 per cent chance that colorectal cancer can be cured.

For more information please call INFOline at 1-866-410-5853.