

DH encourages eligible persons born between 1949 and 1975 to take part in Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme

The Department of Health (DH) announced today (December 30) that from Wednesday (January 1, 2025), Hong Kong residents born between 1949 and 1975 will be eligible to enrol in the Government-subsidised Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP). The DH also urges eligible persons to participate in the CRCSP as early as possible and to adopt healthy lifestyles to prevent colorectal cancer.

Under the CRCSP, asymptomatic Hong Kong residents aged between 50 and 75 are subsidised to undergo screening tests every two years in the private sector for the prevention of colorectal cancer.

Participants in the CRCSP should first attend a medical consultation provided by an enrolled primary care doctor (PCD) and receive a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) screening arranged by the PCD. If the FIT result is positive, the participant will be referred to an enrolled colonoscopy specialist to receive a colonoscopy examination subsidised by the Government. If the FIT result is negative, the participant is advised to repeat the screening two years later.

This year (as of December 1) there have been around 80 500 new participants in the CRCSP, which has reached a record high since its launch in 2016, bringing the total number of eligible participants to approximately 507 000 persons. A cumulative total of about 75 700 persons (15 per cent) had positive FIT screening results, about 39 000 persons (7.7 per cent) were diagnosed to have colorectal adenomas after colonoscopy examination, and about 3 300 persons (0.7 per cent) had colorectal cancer.

Among the colorectal cancer cases diagnosed under the CRCSP, a preliminary analysis of around 2 400 cases revealed that about 56 per cent of these cases were in earlier stages and therefore had a more favourable prognosis.

"Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer locally and the second most common cause of cancer death in Hong Kong. In 2022, there were 5 190 newly diagnosed colorectal cancer cases, and colorectal cancer led to 2 270 deaths. Colorectal Cancer screenings can identify people who have colorectal cancer before they present with symptoms or those at higher risk of colorectal cancer, and enable them to receive early treatment, thus significantly improving prognosis. Removing colorectal adenoma during a colonoscopy can prevent the adenoma from developing into cancer," a spokesman for the DH said.

Currently, around 1 080 PCDs have enrolled in the CRCSP, covering about 2 050 locations, and about 97 per cent of these locations will not charge any

additional payment for the consultation or the FIT screening. Around 260 colonoscopy specialists have also joined the CRCSP. The colonoscopy specialists can only charge participants a co-payment of no more than \$1,000 for providing standard colonoscopy examination services. Currently, colonoscopy examination services are available at about 770 service locations, with over 70 per cent of these locations not charging any additional payment for colonoscopy and polyp removal.

The spokesman called on eligible persons to join the CRCSP starting at age 50 and to prevent colorectal cancer by leading a healthy lifestyle that includes exercising regularly, eating two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables daily, maintaining a healthy body weight, and avoiding smoking and alcohol drinking. Participants are also encouraged to invite eligible relatives and friends to join the CRCSP.

At the same time, the Primary Healthcare Commission is actively promoting the Life Course Preventive Care Plan. Based on the core principles of prevention-oriented and whole-person care, a personalised preventive care plan will be formulated to address the health needs of citizens across different life stages with reference to the latest evidence. Family doctors and primary healthcare professionals will collaborate to provide health advice and education on chronic disease and cancer screening, healthy lifestyles, and vaccination according to age, sex and personal factors such as family history, including recommendations on colorectal cancer screening for those aged 50 or above. Furthermore, as set out in "The Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address", the Government will formulate risk-based screening programmes for prevalent cancers on a gradual basis, including breast cancer screening, exploring the use of artificial intelligence to assist lung cancer screening, and implementing hepatitis B screening to prevent liver cancer. The Government will continue to actively follow up on the relevant work.

The years of birth for eligible persons are updated at the beginning of each year. Eligible persons who are interested in joining the CRCSP must enrol in the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (eHRSS). Please refer to the eHRSS website at www.ehealth.gov.hk or call the Registration Office at 3467 6300 for details.

For more information on the CRCSP, please visit the DH's thematic website www.colonscreen.gov.hk or call the dedicated hotline (3565 6288) during office hours.