

Eligibility of Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme updated

The Department of Health (DH) announced today (December 30) that Hong Kong residents born in the years between 1946 and 1972 are eligible to enrol in the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP) from January 1, 2022.

The CRCSP was implemented as a pilot in 2016, regularised in 2018 and fully implemented in 2020 to subsidise asymptomatic Hong Kong residents aged between 50 and 75 to undergo screening tests every two years in the private sector for prevention of colorectal cancer. The years of birth of eligible persons are updated at the beginning of each year.

Under the programme, participants should 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.

Since the launch of the CRCSP, more than 275 000 eligible persons have participated and received a FIT screening.

On screening outcomes, as of end-November this year, among those participants who had submitted FIT tube samples with analysable results, about 33 900 persons (13.0 per cent) had positive results in the first round of screening, around 7 300 persons (10.8 per cent) had positive results in the second round of screening and around 800 persons (10.2 per cent) had positive results in the third round of screening. Among those FIT-positive participants who underwent a colonoscopy examination, about 22 000 persons (61.7 per cent) had colorectal adenomas and around 2 000 persons had colorectal cancer (5.5 per cent).

A spokesman for the DH said that screenings can identify people who have colorectal cancer before they present with symptoms, or those with higher risk of colorectal cancer, and enable them to receive early treatment, thus significantly improving the prognosis. With colorectal adenoma removed in the course of a colonoscopy, these lesions are also prevented from turning into cancer.

A preliminary analysis of 1 300 colorectal cancer cases diagnosed under the CRCSP also revealed that about 60 per cent of these cases belonged to earlier stages, thus having a more favourable prognosis.

Colorectal cancer is the second most common cancer locally. In 2019, there were 5 556 newly diagnosed colorectal cancer cases, accounting for 15.8 per cent of new cancer cases. Colorectal cancer is also the second most common cause of cancer death after lung cancer in Hong Kong. In 2020,

colorectal cancer led to 2 287 deaths, accounting for 15.4 per cent of all cancer deaths.

There is no quota for participants under the CRCSP and it is heavily subsidised by the Government. A government subsidy of \$280 per consultation by PCD applies, including the second consultation to follow up on a positive FIT test result. Under the standard colonoscopy service package targeted at FIT-positive participants, the subsidy amount is \$8,500 if polyp removal is necessary, whereas the amount is \$7,800 if no polyp removal is needed. Colonoscopy specialists may charge a co-payment not exceeding \$1,000 when providing the standard colonoscopy examination service.

Currently, more than 950 PCDs have successfully enrolled in the CRCSP covering about 1 600 locations, and about 97 per cent of these locations will not charge any additional payment for the screening.

Over 220 colonoscopy specialists have also joined the CRCSP to provide colonoscopy examination services at about 600 service locations. If no polyp removal is necessary, about 86 per cent of these locations will not require additional charges. If polyp removal is needed, about 75 per cent of these locations will not require additional charges.

The spokesman called on eligible persons to join the CRCSP as soon as possible, and prevent colorectal cancer by leading a healthy lifestyle including exercising regularly, eating two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables daily, maintaining a healthy body weight, and saying no to smoking and alcohol.

Eligible persons who are interested to join the CRCSP should 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.

â€œFor 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.