

Eligibility of Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme updated

The Department of Health (DH) announced today (December 28) that Hong Kong residents born in the years between 1948 and 1974 are eligible to enrol in the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP) from January 1, 2024.

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 prevention of colorectal cancer. The years of birth of eligible persons are updated at the beginning of each year.

Participants in the CRCSP 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 CRCSP in 2016, around 420 000 eligible persons have participated in the programme. As of end-November this year, among participants who had submitted FIT tube samples with analysable results, a cumulative total of about 62 900 persons (16.2 per cent) had positive results. Among those FIT-positive participants who underwent a colonoscopy examination, about 32 500 persons (60.8 per cent) had colorectal adenomas and around 2 900 persons (5.4 per cent) had colorectal cancer.

Among the approximately 2 900 colorectal cancer cases diagnosed under the CRCSP, a preliminary analysis of 1 900 cases also revealed that about 57 per cent of these cases belonged to earlier stages, thus having a more favourable prognosis.

A spokesman for the DH reiterated 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.

Colorectal cancer is the second most common cancer locally. In 2021, there were 5 899 newly diagnosed colorectal cancer cases. Colorectal cancer is also the second most common cause of cancer death in Hong Kong. In 2022, colorectal cancer led to 2 270 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 a 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 1 030 PCDs have successfully enrolled in the CRCSP covering about 1 930 locations, and about 97 per cent of these locations will not charge any additional payment for the screening.

More than 240 colonoscopy specialists have also joined the CRCSP to provide colonoscopy examination services at about 770 service locations, and over 70 per cent of these locations will not charge any additional payment for the colonoscopy and polyp removal if necessary.

The spokesman called on eligible persons to join the CRCSP starting from the age of 50 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. Participants with negative FIT results are advised to receive FIT re-screening after two years to maximise the health benefit. Participants are also encouraged to bring along eligible relatives and friends to join the CRCSP.

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.

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.