**NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme: age extension information for GPs**

In August 2018, ministers agreed that bowel cancer screening in England should be offered to people from the age of 50. NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) began the age extension process from April 2021, starting a gradual expansion of the programme to include 56 year olds. This is the first phase of the gradual roll out to lower the screening starting age from 60 to 50 between now and 2025. The table below shows the age ranges and timeframes. NHS bowel cancer screening is offered every 2 years.

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| **Cohort age at first invitation** | **Year invitations start** |
| Age 56 | 2021/22 |
| Age 58 | 2022/23 |
| Age 54 | 2023/24 |
| Age 50 and 52 | 2024/25 |

Bowel scope screening is no longer offered as part of the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. It used to be offered at age 55. The starting age for age extension is 56 so we can invite people first who would previously have been eligible for bowel scope screening.

As each screening centre starts age extension, they will invite people within the relevant age group as of that start date (and not before).

**For example: a centre starts age extension (inviting 56-year olds) on 1 June 2021. They will invite anyone who turns 56 from that date onwards. Anyone who was aged 56 before 1 June 2021 will be invited when they are eligible as part of the next age cohort (at age 58).**

When people become eligible for bowel cancer screening they get an invitation letter in the post, along with an [information leaflet](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bowel-cancer-screening-benefits-and-risks) explaining screening and its possible benefits and risks.

Anyone with symptoms of bowel cancer should speak with their GP. This includes people who have recently had screening or a colonoscopy.

Please be aware that the test offered in the screening programme is designed for people without symptoms and, as such, employs a relatively high cut off (of 120ugHb/gfaeces) as its referral criteria for follow up tests.

If your patient has symptoms suspicious of bowel cancer please still order a FIT test according to local practices, and do not ask your patient to request a test through the screening programme.

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NHS England and NHS Improvement