

For cascade to Primary Care via:

- Primary Cancer Leads
- Cancer Alliances

Email: josephine.ruwende@nhs.net

20 May 2022

Dear GP colleague

Re: The expansion of the Bowel Screening Programme to 58-year olds in London

I am writing to make you aware of changes that are being made to the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme (BCSP) in London.

In April 2021, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) commenced a four-year plan to expand the eligibility of the NHS BCSP to 50-59-year olds. This age extension will meet a key commitment of the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 to modernise the programme and ensure alignment with the government commitments to improve earlier diagnosis of cancer.

Last year (2021/22) was Year 1 of the expansion of the eligible population which saw 56-year olds invited for bowel cancer screening. In May 2022, London started Year 2 and is now inviting 58-year olds. Extension to the remaining age groups will be phased in across the country over the next three years:

Year 1 (2021/22) 56-year olds
Year 2 (2022/23) 58-year olds
Year 3 (2023/24) 54-year olds
Year 4 (2024/25) 52 & 50-year olds

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Age	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
60-74	Invite	Invite	Invite	Invite
58		Invite	Invite	Invite
56	Invite	Invite	Invite	Invite
54			Invite	Invite
52				Invite
50				Invite

Since FIT was introduced into the NHS BCSP in 2019, uptake in London has increased by 7%, with the largest increases in uptake among groups with low participation rates, such as men, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and people in more deprived areas.

If you have any queries, please email Josephine.ruwende@nhs.net.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Josephine Ruwende
Screening and Immunisation Lead (Cancer Screening)
NHS England/Improvement (London Region)

Questions and Answers

What is a FIT kit?

The Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) detects traces of human blood in stool samples. The test is simple to use and can be done at home. It is now being used as the primary test in the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme.

What plans are in place to extend the age cohort for the NHSEI bowel cancer screening programme?

We will be lowering the age range of the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme to include 50 to 59-year olds as stated in the NHS Long Term Plan. To do this safely, the age extension will be gradually rolled out across the country in a phased approach over four years, starting with expanding the programme to include 56-year olds in 2021.

Will everyone aged between 50 and 59 get their FIT test sent through at the same time? Will there be different rollout dates in different parts of the country?

The age extension commenced in April 2021, with invitation of 56-year olds and will roll out until 2024/25. Based on modelling and clinical advice, this is to allow for a safe and effective roll out in line with capacity and to ensure people can access further tests if required. Not everybody will receive their FIT kit in the same year and there will be some regional variation of rollout dates.

How will I know when I'm eligible?

People will receive a programme invitation letter when they become eligible for bowel cancer screening. They will then receive the FIT kit with full instructions and prepaid return packaging 2 weeks later.

Who should I contact if I haven't had my test?

Eligible people are invited automatically by the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. People who are concerned that they may have missed their invitation can call the free bowel cancer screening helpline for advice on 0800 707 60 60. Relay UK is also available - dial 18001 then 0800 707 60 60 from your textphone or the Relay UK app.

I was 58 in April 2022; can I have a screening kit?

If the local screening centre has started screening this age group, individuals who turned 58 from April 2022 will receive an invitation and kit at some point throughout the year until April 2023. If you are experiencing any symptoms of bowel cancer, we recommend speaking to your GP.

Where can I find this information in one place?

Information on bowel cancer and the Screening Programme can be found on <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening/>.

Will there be a communication campaign for members of the public?

London is the currently the first region in England to offer screening to 58-year olds. Wider national communication will be issued once the expansion of bowel screening is rolled out to 58-year olds in all regions across the country.