

28th July 2022

Kia Ora koutou,

Aged Residential Care facilities are being asked to consider carefully before assisting residents to participate in the National Bowel Screening Programme. You may be asked for your opinion.

The National Bowel Screening Programme (NBSP) has been successfully rolled out across Aotearoa to offer free bowel screening every two years to eligible people aged 60 to 74 years. The NBSP saves lives by detecting bowel cancer at an early stage when it can often be more successfully treated.

Bowel screening can also detect polyps. These are not cancer, but they may develop into a cancer over a number of years. Most polyps can be easily removed generally by colonoscopy, reducing the risk that bowel cancer will develop.

The FIT test is simple to do and requires the participant to return a grain of rice size sample to the National Lab in Auckland via the mail in a pre-paid postage envelope.

Negative results are sent to the participant by mail and to their nominated GP via their practice software system. Negative FIT results are automatically placed on recall and the participant is invited by the National Coordination Centre again in 2 years' time.

If a FIT test is positive the participants is notified by their GP, who undertakes a conversation to ascertain the next step. This is generally either a colonoscopy or alternatively if medically indicated a Computed Tomography Colonography (CTC) at their local Hospital Service.

The NBSP is live across all the Te Manawa Taki (Midland) Districts and recently it has been noted that across the region a number of high-level care Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF) residents have undertaken or been assisted to undertake a FIT test which may not have been appropriate for that person.

Unfortunately, this has resulted in a number of residents attending Hospital Services for a First Specialist Appointment (FSA) or undertaking a colonoscopy, including bowel preparation, which has caused unnecessary discomfort and a negative experience for the resident, their whānau and staff involved.

The NBSP is an **opt off** programme where everyone in the eligible age range of 60 – 74 years old is sent a letter containing a consent form and the Fecal immunochemical test (FIT) around the time of their birth date. This means people with medical conditions that interfere with the test result (e.g. inflammatory bowel disease) people already having regular colonoscopies (e.g. because of past bowel cancer) and those who have multiple co-morbidities that might mean treatment is inappropriate (e.g. severe dementia) also receive a test.

We are encouraging rest home staff to support residents to participate in the bowel screening programme, but where there is doubt about whether it is the right thing for a particular person to first support them to seek advice from a clinician, their next of kin and / or medical power of attorney holder.

When it is decided that a resident is not best served by participating in the programme their name can be removed from the NBSP by calling freephone 0800 924432. They will from then not receive any future tests.

Deciding whether or not a high care resident should be part of the NBSP can be a complex issue. The health check at admission and further regular medical checks may be a good opportunity to consider whether the resident should “opt off” the programme.

For more information on the bowel screening programme see: <https://www.timetoscreen.nz/bowel-screening/>

If you would like to discuss this or any aspect of the bowel screening programme further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ngā mihi nui,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Scott-Jones', is displayed within a light grey rectangular box.

Dr Jo Scott-Jones

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