

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 15/2019

For Action:

Chief Executives of HSC Board, PHA and BSO
(for distribution to all relevant staff)

Chief Executives HSC Trusts
(for distribution to all relevant staff)

For information:

**All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for
onward distribution to relevant practice staff)**

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 15/2019

Date: 28 June 2019

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

**NI BOWEL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMME FAECAL IMMUNOCHEMICAL
TEST (FIT) AS REPLACEMENT TEST FOR THE FAECAL OCCULT BLOOD
(FOB) TEST**

ACTION REQUIRED

The Public Health Agency should lead the implementation of the quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) as the primary screening test for bowel cancer within the Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. FIT will replace the current Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT). The Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board, Business Services Organisation and Trusts should work together to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place by the end of February 2020.

Summary

1. The purpose of this letter is to inform HSC organisations and health professionals that the Department of Health and the Northern Ireland Screening Committee (NISC) have formally endorsed the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) as the primary screening test for bowel cancer, in line with the recommendation of the UK National Screening Committee.

Background

2. In January 2016, the UK National Screening Committee recommended that quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) should be adopted by the

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme as the primary screening test for bowel cancer.

3. The benefits of the FIT test are:
 - (i) FIT is a quantitative test which allows the presence of blood in the faecal sample to be measured more reliably using an automated process (FOB is a qualitative test);
 - (ii) FIT is sensitive to a much lower concentrations of blood than FOB and can detect cancers much more reliably and at an earlier stage (higher cancer detection rate than FOB), and also more pre-cancer lesions; and
 - (iii) FIT requires a single faecal sample, whereas FOB requires three, and is more acceptable to those invited to screening. Pilot studies of FIT testing carried out in England and Scotland reported increased participation (uptake) rates.

Resources

4. The 2019/20 funding requirement, to be issued to the Public Health Agency, is estimated to be £300k. Full year additional recurrent costs will be £1.084m per annum, to be issued to the Public Health Agency to commission the service. This will include the cost of additional colonoscopy procedures expected with the move to the FIT test.

Action

5. The Public Health Agency should lead the implementation of the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) as the primary screening test for bowel cancer within the Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme.
6. The Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board, Business Service Organisation and Trusts should work together to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for implementation to commence in February 2020, including the additional colonoscopy capacity required.

Further information

7. For further information please contact Lesley Heaney at Lesley.heaney@health-ni.gov.uk

Yours Sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer

CIRCULATION LIST

Executive Medical Director/Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency
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Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts
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Head of School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Science, QUB
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Director of Postgraduate General Practice Education, NIMDTA
Dean of Life and Health Sciences, University of Ulster
Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB
Head of School of Nursing, University of Ulster (UU)
Chief Executive, Patient Client Council
Chief Executive, RQIA

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
[https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-
advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications)