

**The Forzani MacPhail Colon Cancer Screening Centre
Frequently Asked Questions**

What is the Forzani MacPhail Colon Cancer Screening Centre?

The Forzani and MacPhail Colon Cancer Screening Centre (CCSC) is the only public facility dedicated to colon cancer screening in Canada. Operated by Alberta Health Services, CCSC offers comprehensive care, with a focus on screening and early detection of colon cancer.

CCSC occupies 23,000 square feet and features six endoscopy rooms, three reprocessing rooms, 24 recovery beds, six nurse-clinician pre-assessment rooms and a theatre for public and professional educational activities. Beyond providing clinical screening and treatment, CCSC is actively engaged in research including population health studies and the evaluation of all current and potential techniques for colon cancer screening, including virtual colonography. A large biorepository will allow for translational research in the area.

Why has CCSC been developed?

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CCSC was created to increase capacity in the Calgary Health Region for the screening, and early detection of and treatment of colon cancer. This reflects what we now know about a disease, which results in the death of approximately 9,000 Canadians each year.

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This commitment to expanded screening capacity in the Calgary region underlies what we now know about this disease - it can be effectively prevented and treated when it is detected through screening in its earliest stages. An added benefit of CCSC is that it frees up capacity in the existing hospital-based system currently used for colon cancer screening, for the treatment of those with acute gastrointestinal disease.

The number of colonoscopies performed each year at the CCSC has grown from nearly 5,000 in 2008 to over 18,000 in 2013. At the same time, the number of diagnostic colonoscopies and other endoscopic procedures performed at the hospital endoscopy units has also grown. This represents a remarkable increase in the capacity to perform colonoscopies, an essential diagnostic tool for colon cancer.

Who runs CCSC?

CCSC is funded by Alberta Health Services (AHS) and is part of Alberta's publicly funded health care system.

What services does CCSC provide?

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The primary purpose of CCSC is to reduce the incidence of and risk of dying from colon cancer, by providing colon cancer screening. When you come to CCSC for preventative screening the medical staff will determine what, if any, tests or procedures are required. CCSC is fully equipped with state of the art equipment to perform colonoscopies, the most effective way to screen for and detect colon cancer in its earliest stages.

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Beginning November 2013, alternative screening techniques will include the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) will replace the previously used Home Stool Test. The FIT will be a single sample test, rather than three samples used in the Home Stool Test.

Research protocols will be used to assess other screening techniques including virtual colonography and fecal genetic testing. However, the latter tests will not be a part of the general care provided at CCSC.

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Is there a fee for services provided at CCSC?

People do not pay a fee for their visit to CCSC. CCSC is part of the publicly funded Alberta Health system.

How do you decide what patients to see first and are there eligibility requirements?

When your physician refers you for colon cancer screening, you will be assigned a priority and recommended screening test based on the information your doctor has about your health and the results of a Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT), if you have completed one.

Highest priority will be given to those with a positive Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)

- Incomplete referrals, referrals for patients that do not meet current screening guidelines, and referrals that do not meet eligibility criteria will not be accepted and will be returned to the referring physician.

Criteria

The criteria for being referred for colon cancer screening is as follows:

1. Under age 75 with valid AHCIP coverage and eligible reason for referral (see below)
2. No symptoms—including no gastrointestinal signs or symptoms requiring specialist consultation (i.e. rectal bleeding, anemia, new gastrointestinal symptoms)
3. No medical conditions that would increase the risk of sedation or colonoscopy. If you are taking Coumadin, you need to inform your doctor as there is an increased risk of bleeding during the procedure.

How many patients does CCSC see?

CCSC will see approximately 20,000 people annually.

How long is the wait for an appointment?

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CCSC expected wait times vary, but in general, below are the expected wait times in 2012 based on CCSC established priorities:

- Routine: > 18 months
- Moderate: < 6 months
- Urgent: < 3 months
- Urgent Priority: < 6 weeks

Priority ratings:

- Routine: no personal or family history of colon cancer

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- Moderate: family history of colon cancer
- Urgent: very strong family history of colon cancer or advanced polyps, personal history of polyps or cancer
- Urgent Priority: positive Home Stool Test

How do I know if I should be screened for colon cancer?

If you have symptoms that concern you, it's important to see a doctor as soon as possible. If you have a family doctor, he or she will want to see you as part of your overall health management plan so we encourage you to please contact your doctor immediately. Your family doctor can refer you to CCSC if that is deemed the appropriate course of action. If you do not have a family doctor, or if you are concerned about the wait to get in to see him or her, please visit [Alberta College of Physicians And Surgeons - Find a Physician](#), or call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-5465 .

If you have no symptoms but meet the screening guidelines established by the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology and wish to arrange for screening, you should also see your family doctor. He or she can refer you to CCSC as appropriate.

I need to change my appointment—whom do I call? [\[top\]](#)

If you need to change your appointment for your colonoscopy procedure, please contact the CCSC Reception Desk at 403-944-3800. Please note this is the only contact number for changing booking times.

Can I be screened for colon cancer or do I have to meet the screening guidelines?

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CCSC has been established to provide extra capacity for colon cancer screening in the Calgary Health Region to make sure that people who are at an increased risk for colon cancer can be screened in a timely fashion. To fulfill this mandate and to provide safe and cost-effective screening, people must meet the screening guidelines to undergo screening at CCSC.

How can I arrange to be screened?

Your family physician should be involved in your overall health management plan and so your first step is to make an appointment with your doctor. If you do not have a family doctor, please go to [Alberta College of Physicians And Surgeons - Find a Physician](#), or call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-5465 .

Where is CCSC located?

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CCSC is located on the 6th Floor of the University of Calgary's Teaching, Research and Wellness Building at the Foothills Medical Centre.

The address is:

3280 Hospital Drive,NW
Calgary, AB T2N 4N1

If you don't have a family doctor, you can find a physician by going to [Alberta College of Physicians And Surgeons - Find a Physician](#), or calling Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-5465 .

What is colon cancer?

Cancer of the colon is a cancerous growth on the lining of your large bowel. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer in Canada, after lung cancer.

How many people are affected by colon cancer?

For the most recent recent colon cancer statistics, please visit the [Canadian Cancer Society](#). Below are the 2012 statistics.

- For men, the risk of developing colon cancer is 1 in 13 and 1 in 28 will die from the disease.
- One in 16 women will develop colon cancer and 1 in 32 can expect to die from it.

How can I lower my risk of colon cancer?

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The best way to lower your risk is to get tested regularly beginning at age 50. If you have a personal or family history of polyps or cancer, talk to your doctor about a screening plan that is right for you.

Other ways to reduce your risk of colon cancer include practicing a healthy lifestyle, including:

- getting regular exercise
- eating a healthy diet
- keeping a healthy body weight
- avoiding tobacco and using alcohol only in moderation

Whether you have already been doing some of these things for a long time or are just starting to make changes toward adopting a healthy lifestyle, it is still important that you get tested.

Find out more about reducing your risk by calling the Canadian Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333, Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 6

p.m, or by visiting the Canadian Cancer Society website at www.cancer.ca.

Is there a specific age to start getting tested for colon cancer?

Everyone should start regular testing at age 50. If you have a family history of colon cancer or polyps (abnormal growths of the lining of the colon that can progress to cancer), your doctor may begin testing you at age 40 or even younger, and may want to test you more often than people without a family history

My family member has colon cancer - can I be tested earlier?

Yes, if you have a family history of polyps (abnormal growths of the lining of the colon that can progress to cancer) or colon cancer. A family history means one or more first-degree relatives—parent, sibling or child. This information is important for estimating whether you are at risk of developing colon cancer or another disease. Your doctor may begin testing you at age 40 or younger, and may want to test you more often than people without a family history.

I'm worried about constipation/diarrhea - can I have the test?

If you have symptoms or are worried about a change in your bowel habits, then you should see your doctor. Although your doctor may ask you to do a Home Stool Test, or book a colonoscopy for you, your symptoms should be completely evaluated first. Other tests may be more appropriate.

What do I have to do to get tested for colon cancer? [\[top\]](#)

You should make an appointment with your family doctor and discuss with your doctor the type of test that is right for you. Your family doctor can order a FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) or refer you for a colonoscopy.

What is the difference between screening and testing?

Screening is another word for testing in people who do not have any symptoms.

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Screening programs test otherwise healthy people to identify the presence of disease before symptoms occur. When colon cancer is detected early, there are often more treatment options and greater chances of successful treatment.

What screening tests are available in Calgary?

In Calgary, the recommended screening tests are a Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) and colonoscopy. This website can give you information about both types of tests to help you talk to your doctor about what test is right for you.

What is a Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)?

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This simple test looks for blood in your stool that you cannot see. The blood might be from polyps or cancer, or it may be from something else such as hemorrhoids. For the test, you will collect samples at home from three bowel movements in a row and take the samples to a lab for testing.

Will the FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) tell me if I have cancer?

The Home stool test does not diagnose colon cancer, but the results will tell you whether a colonoscopy is required.

What does a positive or negative FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) mean?

Results usually take a few days. You will get them through your doctor's office.

Test results: **NEGATIVE** (No or only very small amounts of blood were found). If no blood is found, you will continue with regular testing yearly or every other year.

It is possible that the test result is falsely negative, which means that the test failed to detect blood in your stool even though cancer is present. This can happen if the tumour is not bleeding at the time the sample is taken, or if blood is not present in the part of the bowel movement where the sample was taken. If a test is falsely negative,

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cancer may not be found until the next round of testing, or until symptoms develop. This is why it is important to be tested regularly.

Test results may be POSITIVE (Abnormal amounts of blood are found). The test cannot tell what the source of the blood is. You will need a colonoscopy to see if there is cancer or a precancerous polyp.

Other causes of a positive test result could be due to other causes of bleeding such as:

- ulcers
- hemorrhoids
- inflammatory bowel disease (colitis)

In this case, the test result will be considered a “false positive”, because the positive result does not mean it is cancer.

To have the most accurate test result possible, follow your doctor’s advice about preparation before the test.

What is a colonoscopy? [\[top\]](#)

This test lets a doctor look at the lining of the rectum and the colon and remove polyps. For the test, you will go to a day clinic where you get a sedative and a doctor uses a long, thin tube with a small camera to look at your entire colon.

What is the difference in a traditional colonoscopy and a virtual colonoscopy?

Both tests allow a doctor to look at the rectum and colon for polyps and tumours.

A traditional colonoscopy is performed by inserting a long, thin tube with a small camera into the colon. If polyps are found they can be removed during the test.

A virtual colonoscopy uses CT scanning to produce a computerized image of the colon. If polyps are found, a traditional colonoscopy must be performed to remove them.

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A virtual colonoscopy is not always as effective as a traditional colonoscopy at detecting polyps and tumours, especially growths smaller than 6mm. However, it may be an option to consider in patients that cannot undergo a traditional colonoscopy.

Can I get a virtual colonoscopy in Alberta?

There are private clinics in Calgary and Edmonton that offer virtual colonoscopies on a fee for service basis. Traditional colonoscopies and Home Stool Tests are covered by Alberta Health Care when referred by your doctor and are the recommended methods for colon cancer screening in Alberta. In some cases, your physician will recommend a virtual colonoscopy and the test will then be covered by Alberta Health Care.

What is the difference in virtual colonoscopy and CT colonography?

CT colonography is another name for a virtual colonoscopy. It involves the use of a CT scanner and computer software to create a 3-D image of the colon.

Can I get a Fecal DNA test in Alberta? [\[top\]](#)

Fecal DNA tests are not yet available for screening purposes in Alberta. Large-scale clinical studies are still needed to determine whether fecal DNA tests will replace Home Stool Tests in the future.

I heard a news report about 20 things that cause colon cancer. Should I really believe it all?

Health reports can be found in the media every day. Sometimes the catchy headlines can be confusing or misleading. The best thing to do is ask questions about the reports you find.

What is the Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program?

In March of 2007, the [Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program](#) was launched. It is a province-wide initiative recommending that all Albertans beginning at age 50 be tested annually using a Home Stool Test.

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The Alberta Colon Cancer Screening Program (ACRCSP) is an organized provincial colon cancer screening program coordinated by Alberta Health Services in partnership with health care providers dedicated to increasing the number of men and women ages 50 to 74 who have regular colon cancer screening. [\[top\]](#)

ACRCSP develops activities to help contribute to the prevention and early detection of colon cancer, including:

- Providing information and education to specific age groups and health care providers;
- Increasing access to colon cancer screening services throughout the province;
- Working with health care providers and labs to correspond directly with patients who have been screened;
- Providing a follow-up reminder system for health care providers;
- Providing colon cancer screening quality assurance;
- Supporting continual quality improvement in the delivery of colon cancer screening services based on feedback from Albertans and health care providers as well as research information.

For more information about the Alberta Colon Cancer Screening Program, visit www.screeningforlife.ca [\[top\]](#)