

## What is an FOBT?

- An FOBT is a simple, non-invasive test that can be completed by participants in their own home.
- The test detects microscopic amounts of blood, often released from bowel cancers or their precursors (polyps or adenomas) into the bowel motion.
- The test usually requires samples from two to three separate bowel motions to increase the chances of detecting this blood.
- FOBTs are not a diagnostic test but are used to identify participants who require further investigation.

## How accurate is an FOBT?

- Under ideal conditions, an FOBT may detect 80-90% of cancers and 60-75% of large adenomas (NHMRC, 1999).
- In screening programs, a person with an abnormal (positive) FOBT has a 30-45% chance of having an adenoma and a 3-5% chance of colorectal cancer (NHMRC, 1999).

## What kind of FOBT is being used in the Pilot?

- At least two FOBTs will be used in the Pilot.
- These FOBTs will most likely be immunochemical tests that do not require special dietary restrictions.
- Participants will be randomly allocated an FOBT.
- FOBTs will be clustered by household so that participants in the same household are sent the same FOBT at the same time.

## Are there special guidelines for sampling?

- Patients will be sent an invitation pack by mail, that will include an FOBT kit and detailed instructions on how to complete the test.
- Patients will be advised to carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions contained in the kit.
- Patients who require help completing their FOBT or have difficulty understanding the test kit instructions can contact the Bowel Cancer Screening Helpline for assistance.
- Participants should return the completed FOBT direct to the pathology laboratory in the pre-paid envelope provided.

## Who will FOBT results be sent to?

- Participants will be asked to nominate the GP to whom their test results are to be sent on the 'Participant Details' form included in their invitation pack.
- The pathology laboratory will send test results to the participant, their nominated GP and the Register within two weeks of receiving the FOBT.
- GPs will be advised of both positive and negative FOBT results and will be sent a copy of the pathology report.

## What will participants with a positive FOBT result be advised to do?

- Participants with a positive FOBT result will be advised to contact their GP to discuss the result and any further tests required.
- If it does not appear that a participant has seen their GP within one month of being advised of a positive result, the Register will send a reminder letter to the participant and their nominated GP (see NOTE overleaf).

## What about participants with a negative FOBT result?

- Participants with a negative FOBT result will be:
  - reinvited to screen again in two years by the Register; and
  - advised to contact their doctor immediately should they develop any of the symptoms described in the information booklet provided to them.
- Participants with a negative FOBT result who indicate (on their 'Participant Details' form) that they have current symptoms when returning their test will be advised to visit their GP.

...continued overleaf

## When should a colonoscopy be undertaken?

- All positive FOBT results should be investigated by colonoscopy.
- If a colonoscopy is considered inappropriate, GPs are asked to advise the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot Register using the 'GP Assessment: Not Referred for Colonoscopy' form provided with this resource kit.
- If a participant does not appear to have had a colonoscopy within three months of the positive FOBT result, the Register will send a reminder letter to the participant and their nominated GP (See NOTE below).

## What happens if an FOBT is damaged or lost and needs replacing?

- Participants will be advised to call the Bowel Cancer Screening Helpline to request a replacement kit.
- The Register will send a replacement kit to the participant. Participants will receive the same test kit as originally sent.
- GPs can also contact the Helpline or the Register to request a replacement kit for a Pilot participant.

## What happens if an FOBT is incomplete or inconclusive?

- The pathology laboratory will contact the participant and advise that they need to complete another test.
- The Register will send a further kit to the participant with explanatory information.

**NOTE:** The Register will **not** be cross matching with Medicare claims history data to identify whether a participant has seen their GP to discuss a positive result or whether a participant has had a colonoscopy. Non-receipt of information regarding a consultation or diagnostic test will trigger a reminder letter.

An information payment will be made to GPs, and certain other service providers, for provision of information regarding consultations with Pilot participants and diagnostic testing.

(Information on Pilot payment arrangements for GPs is provided in Fact Sheet 8, information on the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot Register is provided in Fact Sheet 9)