

Steps in Cancer Screening

Guide for First Nations Community Members



Step 1

Learning about cancer screening

“What is all the fuss about cancer screening?”



Cancer screening is testing done on people who have **no symptoms** and generally **feel fine**, but are at risk of getting cancer. Regular screening is important because it can find some cancers or pre-cancers early when treatment has a **better chance of working**.



Three organized cancer screening programs are offered to eligible people in Ontario.

Breast



Mammogram

Women 50 to 74 years old
Every 2 years for most

Colon (Colorectal)



Fecal immunochemical test (FIT)

Women and Men 50 to 74 years old
at average risk
Every 2 years for most

Colonoscopy

Women and Men 50 to 74 years old at increased risk (who have a parent, brother, sister or child who was diagnosed with colon cancer)
Every 10 years for most

Cervical



Pap test (cytology test)

Women 21 to 70 years old
Every 3 years for most

Places to learn about more cancer screening

- Resources at your community health centre or nursing station – ask your community health representative (CHR).
- Trustworthy internet sites. See “Cancer screening resources” on the back page of this guide for details.



You may get a letter asking you to get cancer screening...

These letters are part of Ontario’s cancer screening programs. If you did not get a letter, you may still be able to get screened. Talk to a doctor or nurse at your community health centre or nursing station.



Cancer screening is about helping you live a good life ...

Step 2

Talking it over

“Why is cancer screening right for me?”

There are many people you can talk to about cancer screening.
Who are you comfortable talking with?



Contacts and supports in your community



Family or friend:

Nurse or doctor:

Community health worker:

“ Am I eligible for screening (right age and sex)? ”

“ Which cancer screening tests are right for me? ”

“ How will screening help me to stay healthy? ”

“ Have I done a screening test before? ”



“ Have my family or friends ever been screened? What was it like? ”

“ What would help me feel more comfortable while getting screened? ”

“ What will happen during the screening tests? ”



Remember!

If you have any of the symptoms on page 13, talk to a doctor or nurse at your community health centre or nursing station.



Step 3

Deciding to participate and making an appointment

“Cancer screening can keep me healthy — I am in!”



If you decide that cancer screening is right for you, the next step is to make appointments for your screening tests.

Breast cancer screening

Mammogram is the breast cancer screening test used in Ontario*

You can make a mammogram appointment a few different ways:

Talk with a **doctor or nurse** at your community health centre or nursing station.

They can help you make a mammogram appointment with a referral. They will work with Non Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) to set up your travel and will tell you your travel details.

Sometimes groups of women travel together to get mammograms, for example on a chartered plane. If you have missed the group trip, you can still get a mammogram appointment on your own.



Make your own appointment **without** a referral.

- Call the mobile cancer screening coach (1-807-684-7777).
- Call the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP). See details on the back page of this guide.



The OBSP site will make sure you are eligible for breast cancer screening, give you an appointment date and give your appointment details to NIHB so they can organize your travel.

Then your community health centre or nursing station will confirm your travel details with you.

You can get a mammogram in Winnipeg if it is closer and easier for you. But your doctor or nurse in Ontario may not be able to get your results. You may also have to arrange for your own travel with NIHB.

* If you are 30 to 69 years old and think you may be at **high risk for breast cancer**, talk to a doctor or nurse at your community health centre or nursing station. They may send you for screening based on your family history and medical history.

Step 4

Completing screening tests

“Well that was not so bad!”



To get a mammogram, you may need to travel outside of your community.

For example, you may need to go to an OBSP site or on the mobile screening coach (see the back page of this guide for details).

What to expect:

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. During your appointment, a technician who is trained to give mammograms will use an X-ray machine to take pictures of your breasts.

- The technician will place your breast on the X-ray machine and a plastic plate will press down on your breast.
- You will feel some pressure on your breast, similar to a tight blood pressure cuff, for a few seconds during the X-ray. This pressure does not harm your breast tissue.
- You can ask to know what is happening during your mammogram.
- You can ask to stop the mammogram at any time if you do not feel comfortable or do not want to keep going – **it is your choice.**



Remember!

You can ask the doctor or nurse what will happen at your appointment.

To prepare for the mammogram:

- Do not wear deodorant, antiperspirant, body lotion or talcum (baby) powder on the appointment day.
- Try to wear a top that is easy to take off, like a loose sweater that is easy to pull over your head, because you will be asked to take your top off for the test.



Step 3

Deciding to participate and making an appointment

“Cancer screening can keep me healthy — I am in!”



Colon (colorectal) cancer screening – Average risk

Fecal immunochemical test (FIT) is the main colon cancer screening test used for people at average risk in Ontario*



You can ask for a FIT kit **in** your community:

- At your community health centre or nursing station – call or drop in to make an appointment to ask for a FIT kit.
- By calling Telehealth Ontario and asking for a FIT kit (1-866-828-9213) if you do not have a doctor or nurse.



...or **outside** of your community:

- On the mobile cancer screening coach (1-807-684-7777).
- At a health clinic or some walk-in clinics in a community near you – contact them for more information and to make an appointment.

The FIT kit will be mailed to you or to the community health centre, nursing station or clinic. You can pick it up about 1 to 3 weeks after you ask for it.



Remember!

When you ask for the FIT kit, ask the doctor or nurse:

- How long it should take for your FIT kit to arrive and where it will be mailed.
- How you do the test.
- How to return your FIT kit when you are done – either by mail or by dropping it off at the community health centre, nursing station or clinic.

If your FIT kit does not come by the time the doctor or nurse said (usually about 1 to 3 weeks), contact them or call LifeLabs (1-833-676-1426).

* Colon cancer screening is for men, women and gender-diverse people (for example: trans/transgender, non-binary). FIT replaced the fecal occult blood test (FOBT) in Ontario in 2019 for people at **average risk** (without a parent, brother, sister or child who was diagnosed with colon cancer). In some cases, flexible sigmoidoscopy can be used instead of FIT, if it is available.

Step 4

Completing screening tests

“Well that was not so bad!”



You can do the **FIT at home**. You can also ask about doing it at the community health centre, nursing station or clinic where you pick it up.

Detailed instructions on doing the FIT are included with the kit. They are also online in Oji-Cree, Ojibway and Cree (see the back page of this guide for details).

- To get your poop sample, scrape the grooves at the end of the FIT stick along your poop – you may need to repeat this until the grooves are covered. Then put the stick with your poop back into the FIT tube and snap the tube closed. Put the FIT tube into the plastic bag, seal the bag and put it in the pre-paid yellow return envelope to LifeLabs.
- You can mail the envelope. Or you can contact the community health centre, nursing station or clinic to find out where to drop off your kit.
- If you have more questions about how to do your FIT, contact your community health centre, nursing station or call the Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) contact centre (1-866-662-9233) for help.



Remember!

- Make sure your name and birth date on the FIT kit label are right. Also make sure the FIT kit has not expired (see expiry date printed on FIT tube).
- Do the FIT as soon as possible because it can expire. The lab will not be able to process it if it expires or if you send it to the lab too long after you got it.
- Make sure you write the date you get your poop sample on the FIT tube. You only need to get 1 poop sample.
- You do not have to stop taking any medications or eating any foods to do the FIT.



Step 3

Deciding to participate and making an appointment

“Cancer screening can keep me healthy — I am in!”



Colon (colorectal) cancer screening – Increased risk

Colonoscopy is the colon cancer screening test for people at increased risk in Ontario*

If you are at **increased risk** because you have a **family history** of colon cancer, talk to your doctor or nurse about having a colonoscopy.



- Your community health centre or nursing station will give you your appointment and travel details. NIHB will pay for most of your travel costs.
- You need someone you trust (an escort) to come with you because you will take a medication that helps you relax or sleep (a sedative) for the colonoscopy.
- You can get a colonoscopy in Winnipeg if it is closer and easier for you. But your doctor or nurse in Ontario may not be able to get your test results. You may also have to arrange for your own travel with NIHB.



* People at **increased risk** (who have a parent, brother, sister or child who was diagnosed with colon cancer) should get checked with a colonoscopy starting at 50 years old, or 10 years before the age their relative got colon cancer, whichever comes first. They should get checked again every 5 to 10 years, based on their family history. (Every 5 years if their relative got colon cancer before age 60. Every 10 years if their relative got colon cancer at age 60 or older.) Colonoscopy is **also** for people at average risk who get an abnormal FIT result.

Step 4

Completing screening tests

“Well that was not so bad!”

You will probably have to travel outside of your community for your colonoscopy (for example: to Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Kenora, Winnipeg) so you may need to fly or drive to your appointment.



Before your appointment:

- Ask your doctor or nurse how to prepare and what to expect.
- The day before your test, you will need to drink a liquid medication recommended by your doctor or nurse that makes you poop a lot. You have to take this medication because your colon (or bowel) has to be empty for the test.
- You may have to take a form or prescription into the pharmacy to get the medication, or you may pick the medication up from your community health centre or nursing station.
- If you are not sure about how to drink the liquid medication, you can ask when you pick it up.

During the colonoscopy:

- The doctor will use specialized equipment to look at the lining of your rectum and your colon.
- The sedative will help you relax or sleep during the colonoscopy.

After the colonoscopy:

- Your escort will help you to leave the hospital or clinic because you might still be sleepy.
- You may not be able to go home right away after the colonoscopy. You may need to stay for one night at the hotel, hostel or other accommodation in the city or town where you had your test done.
- You might feel bloating, gas and mild cramps after the colonoscopy.
- If a biopsy (sample of tissue) was done or a polyp (small growth that forms inside the colon) was removed during the colonoscopy, you may have small amounts of blood in your poop for 1 to 2 days after.
- The doctor should give you a form with information about what to expect after the colonoscopy. They may also give you your initial test results.
- Your final test results will go to your doctor or nurse at home.

Step 3

Deciding to participate and making an appointment

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Cervical screening

Pap test (cytology test) is the cervical screening test used in Ontario*



You can have a cervical screening test done:

in your community:

- At your community health centre or nursing station. Call or drop in to make an appointment for a Pap test. If there is a doctor or nurse who you feel most comfortable with, ask to make your appointment with them.



... or outside of your community:

- On the mobile screening coach in a community near you (1-807-684-7777). See details on the back page of this guide.
- At a health clinic or some walk-in clinics in a community near you. Contact them for more information and to make an appointment.



Remember!

- Ask the doctor or nurse to explain the test and what to expect during it.
- You can have someone you trust with you in the room during the Pap test.

Tell the doctor or nurse to stop the test at any point if you are uncomfortable and do not want to continue — **it is your choice.**

* The Pap test is sometimes called the cytology test. Cervical screening is recommended for people with a cervix (including women, trans men and gender non-binary people). The cervix is a body part that connects the uterus (womb) to the vagina (genital opening). Currently, cervical screening is recommended for people who are or have been sexually active, starting at age 21. The screening program is updating this recommendation. If you are under 25, talk to a doctor or nurse about whether you should wait until age 25 before starting cervical screening.

Step 4

Completing screening tests

“Well that was not so bad!”

During your **Pap test (cytology test)** appointment...

- You will lie down on an exam table. Once you are comfortable, the doctor or nurse will gently insert a speculum into your vagina. The speculum is a medical tool that opens your vagina.
- They will use a swab to take a few cell samples from your cervix and send them to a lab to look at more closely.
- The test will only take a few minutes.



Screening test tips – for all 3 screening programs!



The screening tests are **free for eligible people in Ontario**. **Make sure your Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card is up to date. NIHB will pay for most of your travel costs.**

When you make your **breast, cervical** or **colon** cancer screening appointment, let them know:

- If you will need a **translator** to be at your appointment.
- If you need some **extra support** or **someone to come with you** to your appointment.

Note! NIHB usually only pays for an escort to come with you to a colonoscopy appointment because you will be given medication that makes you sleepy. But the doctor or nurse can still try asking NIHB to pay for someone to come with you to other kinds of appointments, like a mammogram.

- If you have a letter from Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) about cancer screening (and bring the letter with you).
- If the date does not work for you and ask them to change it.

Remember!

Before you leave your community for a screening appointment...

- Bring a phone number to call if you are not sure where to go when you arrive at the airport, for example:
 - » Wequedong Lodge of Thunder Bay (1-807-623-1432)
 - » Jeremiah McKay Kabayshewekamik Hostel & Client Services in Sioux Lookout (1-807-737-3850)
- Make sure you know the name of the doctor or nurse you usually see at home.

At your screening appointment, ask when and how you will get your results.

- You can ask to have your results sent to your doctor or nurse, community health centre or nursing station. You can also ask for a phone number to call in case you do not get your results.

Step 5

Getting your screening test results

“How long until I hear back?”



At your screening appointment, ask the doctor or nurse **how you will get your test results and how long it will take to get them.**

Sometimes they only have time to contact people who have abnormal results. If you want to know about your results even if they are normal, **ask how you can find out about them.**

How to find out about your results:



You may get a **letter in the mail** from Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) with your screening test results (for the Pap test and FIT). For mammogram results, you may get a letter in the mail or the OBSP site may contact you directly.



The doctor or nurse may call you by **phone** or using the secure Ontario Telemedicine Network (**OTN**) or Keewaytinook Okimakanak (**KO**) eHealth Telemedicine Services.



Some doctors and nurses like to give test results **in person**. If you get your results in person, you can ask questions about them and what to do next. Try to bring someone you trust with you. They can help you remember what the doctor or nurse says.



Remember!

- If you are not sure what your results mean, ask the doctor or nurse to explain them in a different way. Sometimes a translator can also help you understand your results. See the back page of this guide for translation support services.
- If you do not get your results within about 4 weeks of your test, call the doctor or nurse to let them know.

Step 6

Following up on your test results

“What happens next?”

If your screening test results are **normal**, your next step is to get screened again in:

- **2 years** for breast cancer screening (mammogram) for most women
- **2 years** for colon cancer screening (**FIT**) for most women and men
- **10 years** for colon cancer screening (**colonoscopy**) for most women and men
- **3 years** for cervical screening **Pap test (cytology test)** for most women

Sometimes you need to get screened more often – the doctor or nurse will tell you whether you need to do that. You can write down when to get your next screening test in the **tracking table** on page 14 of this guide.

If your screening test results are **abnormal**, it is very important to get **more tests** done. Most people with abnormal results **do not have cancer**, but more tests are needed to make sure. You might need to do the same screening tests again or you might need:



Breast → Breast ultrasound, breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and/or biopsies



Colon → Colonoscopy



Cervical → Colposcopy



Remember!

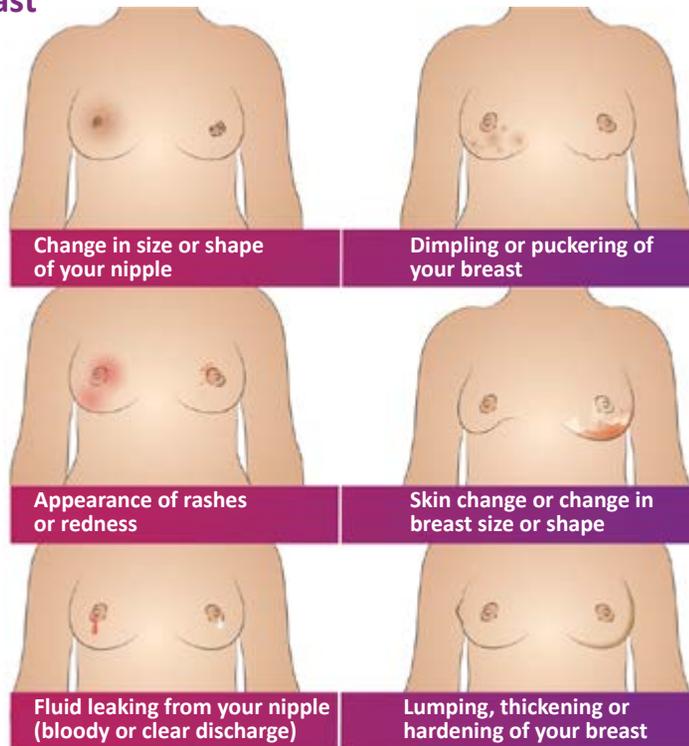
- The doctor or nurse will tell you about any follow up tests you need if your screening test result is abnormal. You may need to travel outside of your community for these tests.
- If the follow up tests you get find that you have cancer, the doctor or nurse will talk with you about a diagnosis and treatment plan.
- Ask to bring someone who you trust with you when you get the follow up tests or talk to a doctor. The doctor or nurse might be able to get NIHB to pay for someone to come with you (an escort) if they ask.
- If you have trouble understanding English, make sure you have a translator with you when you get follow up tests or talk to a doctor. See the back page of this guide for details.
- Indigenous patient navigators can help to support and guide you. See the back page of this guide for ways to contact a navigator.



Cancer symptoms to look out for



Breast



Remember!

Cancer screening is for people who do not have symptoms. If you have any of these symptoms, talk to someone you trust and talk to a doctor or nurse about what to do next. You can also call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.



Colon (Colorectal)

- Blood in your poop
- Changes in your poop – diarrhea (soft or liquid poop) or constipation (having trouble pooping)
- Feeling that your rectum does not empty all the way after pooping
- Stomach discomfort (for example: gas, abdominal cramps and feeling bloated)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Anemia (drop in red blood cell count)



Cervical

- Abnormal fluid from your vagina that might be watery or red
- Continued abnormal bleeding from your vagina
- Bleeding from your vagina during or after sex
- Abnormal pelvic pain that you may also feel in your back or upper leg

Screening tracker



	Screening test date	Doctor, nurse or screening test location	Results and notes	Next screening test date
 <p>Breast cancer screening Mammogram Women 50 to 74 years old Every 2 years for most</p>				
 <p>Colon (colorectal) cancer screening Fecal immunochemical test (FIT) Men and Women at average risk 50 to 74 years old Every 2 years for most</p> <p>Colonoscopy Men and Women at increased risk 50 to 74 years old Every 10 years for most</p>				
 <p>Cervical screening Pap test (cytology test) Women 21 to 70 years old Every 3 years for most</p>				

Cancer screening resources:

Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) website
cancercareontario.ca/en/get-checked-cancer and
cancercareontario.ca/FITinstructions

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre
tbrhsc.net/cancerscreening

Canadian Cancer Society
cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/reduce-cancer-risk/
find-cancer-early/

Indigenous Patient Navigators:

Provide support and advocate for First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous patients and families. They can also help you with translation.

- **Indigenous Patient Navigator – Northwest Regional Cancer Care** (1-877-696-7223 ext. 4324 or 1-807-684-7200)
- **Sioux Lookout First Nation Health Authority Patient Navigator** (1-866-447-8388 or 1-807-737-1623)
- **Chiefs of Ontario NIHB Navigator – North** (1-877-517-6527 or 1-807-626-9339)
- **Manitoba Southern Chiefs Organization Inc. NIHB Navigator** (1-866-876-9701 or 1-204-946-1869 ext. 120)

More medical translation services:

Wequedong Lodge of Thunder Bay (Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Swampy Cree translation) (1-807-623-1432)

Jeremiah McKay Kabayshewekamik Hostel (Client representatives provide translation) (1-807-737-3850)

Gizhewaadiziwin Health Access Centre (Ojibway Medical Translator Program) (1-807-274-3131)

Where to get cancer screening:

The best place to get cancer screening is at your **community health centre, nursing station** or **family health team**. If these are not options, you can contact a clinic that is open to the public.

You can also get screening on the **mobile cancer screening coach** (sometimes called the “big bus”). The coach travels throughout Northwestern Ontario - call and ask when the coach will be near your community (1-807-684-7777).

Call an OBSP site to make a **breast** cancer screening (mammogram) appointment:

Thunder Bay (1-807-684-7777
or 1-807-683-4411)
Fort Frances (1-807-274-4808)

Kenora (1-807-468-9861)
Sioux Lookout (1-807-737-6579)
General line (1-800-668-9304)

If you do not have a doctor or nurse, or you are not sure, call 1-866-828-9213 to ask for a **colon** (colorectal) cancer screening test (FIT kit). If you need help understanding how to do the FIT, you can call 1-866-662-9233.

Telehealth Ontario gives free medical advice. Call 1-866-797-0000 to ask about breast, cervical and colon cancer screening.

NIHB medical transportation support (Thunder Bay Zone) 1-807-343-5390 or 1-877-779-7749

Aboriginal Health Access Centres also do cancer screening.
(Open to community members in the region - call to ask to register)

Anishnawbe Mushkiki Aboriginal Health Access Centre	1260 Golf Links Rd 3rd Floor Thunder Bay	1-807-623-0383
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Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'yewigamig (WNHAC)	212 4th Ave S Kenora	1-807-467-8770
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Gizhewaadiziwin Health Access Centre	1460 Idylwild Dr Fort Frances	1-807-274-3131
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