

NZ resumes bowel screening programme amid pandemic

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Bowel screening test kits being sent out after COVID-19 pause



The National Bowel Screening Programme in New Zealand is sending out thousands of home test kits this week for the first time since the programme was paused in response to COVID-19.

Around 3000 Faecal Immunological Test (FIT) kits, designed to detect early bowel cancers, are being sent to New Zealanders, aged 60 to 74, who are eligible for free bowel screening. The figure will increase to pre-COVID-19 levels of typically 5000 kits per week from next week.

Programme Clinical Director Dr Susan Parry says the kit mail-out represents the last stage of the phased re-start of the National Bowel Screening Programme and can't come soon enough.

Dr Parry says whilst it was hard to have to pause the programme in response to COVID-19, the bowel screening programme was interrupted for only three months.

"Having a screening programme back on track so soon, as we have in New Zealand, is certainly not the norm."

The staged roll out of the National Bowel Screening Programme is expected to be delayed by about three months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Full implementation is now expected to be completed in December, rather than June 2021.