

---

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2009HSERV0002-000075  
Jan. 22, 2009

Ministry of Health Services

### **B.C. TO LAUNCH PROGRAM FOR COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING**

PENTICTON – British Columbia will launch a three-year, \$3.8-million pilot colorectal cancer screening program to test the effectiveness of a new screening test in the early detection of colorectal cancer, Health Services Minister George Abbott announced today.

“Colorectal cancer is the second-deadliest type of cancer for British Columbians, but only about 20 per cent of British Columbians over the age of 50 are routinely screened,” said Abbott. “If colorectal cancer is detected in its early stages, patients have an improved chance of being cured. The pilot program will provide participants with access to a new, user-friendly screening test and is a great example of our commitment to increase effective prevention in primary health care.”

The B.C. Cancer Agency’s Colon Check program will begin in Penticton in January 2009 and screening will continue for 24 months. Screening test kits will be available through a Colon Check hotline to individuals in Penticton who are between the ages of 50 to 74. Once the pilot is complete and results are analyzed, the Province will examine the feasibility of expanding the program provincewide.

The pilot program will be led by the BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), and family physicians will play a key role in encouraging eligible patients to participate.

“When it comes to screening, we all know the sooner the better,” said colorectal cancer survivor and Penticton resident Bonnie Jenic. “Screening doesn’t take long, it’s effective, and it’s so important. It could take so long to detect an early cancer otherwise.”

Participants will be screened using an immunochemical fecal occult blood test [iFOBT], which is able to detect blood in the stool that is not visible to the naked eye. iFOBT is easily performed at home and, unlike other colorectal cancer screening tests, does not require any dietary restrictions. After using the test kit, patients will return it to a designated drop-off point.

All tests will be analyzed in the PHSA Central Processing and Receiving Laboratory in Vancouver. Patients who test positive, as well as those individuals identified as having a higher than average risk of developing colorectal cancer, will be referred for follow-up.

“Early detection of colorectal cancer means more treatment options for patients and a better long-term prognosis,” said Brian Schmidt, interim president of the BC Cancer Agency. “This pilot program will nicely complement our other provincewide cancer screening programs and allow us to study the effectiveness of the screening with iFOBT while raising awareness of the importance of early detection of colorectal cancer.”

In its early stages, colorectal cancer may not cause any symptoms. However, warning signs of a potential problem include blood in the stool, changes in bowel habits, abdominal or pelvic pain, bloating and unexplained weight loss.

“The five general surgeons in Penticton are enthusiastic about the implementation of this pilot program,” said Dr. Bryan Tighe, general surgeon in Penticton and Colon Check program advocate. “We are looking forward to the development of what we hope will be a new standard of care for this province.”

It is estimated that there will be more than 2,900 new diagnoses of colorectal cancer in the province this year, and that over 1,200 British Columbians will die of the disease in the same time period.

Negotiations are currently underway to select a second community for participation in the BC Cancer Agency’s Colon Check program, and it is anticipated that screening will begin in this location later in the year. British Columbians with a high risk factor currently have access to colorectal cancer screening through their physicians’ offices and this screening is paid for by the Medical Services Plan.

The implementation of Colon Check is part of B.C.’s cancer control strategy. Recent investments in cancer care and treatment include the state of the art BC Cancer Agency Abbotsford Centre which opened its doors to patients in August 2008, and approval of funding for another BC Cancer Agency regional centre in Prince George that is scheduled for completion in 2012.

Media contact: Bernadette Murphy  
Media Relations Manager  
Ministry of Health Services  
250 952-1887 (media line)  
250 213-9590 (cell)

Nicole Adams  
Communications Director  
BC Cancer Agency  
604 230-1463 (cell)  
604 641-5167 (pager)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province’s news feeds using RSS, visit the Province’s website at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).