

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Get Back on Track: Get Screened for Colon Cancer

(Thunder Bay, ON – March 1, 2024) March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month. In Ontario, colon cancer is the second most common cause of cancer related death. However, if found early through screening and treated in time, there is a 90 per cent chance it can be cured. It's time to get screened for colon cancer and get back on track with your health.

“In Northwestern Ontario, we are behind the rest of the province in the number of people who are up to date with colon screening,” shares Dr. Jordan Green, Regional Colorectal Screening and GI Endoscopy Lead for Ontario Health - Cancer Care Ontario at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. “Only 58.4 per cent of eligible people in our region are participating in colon cancer screening. During Colon Cancer Awareness Month, we are encouraging people to talk to their primary care providers about their colon cancer screening options and take action to get screened.”

Individuals ages 50 to 74 with no first-degree relative (parent, sibling, child) with colon cancer are at average risk for colon cancer and should be screened using a fecal immunochemical test (FIT) every two years. If you have a family history, the recommendations for screening will differ. For example, if you have a first-degree relative who had colon cancer, then a colonoscopy may be a better test. Please check with your primary care provider to determine which test is right for you.

#### Signs and Symptoms

Some of the signs/symptoms of colon cancer can include:

- Blood in the stool.
- Change in bowel habits.
- Anemia (drop in red blood cell count) that is caused by low iron.
- Weight loss.

However, many people will not experience any symptoms, especially at the early stages of colon cancer. This is why screening people who have no symptoms is important. If you are experiencing symptoms, talk to your primary care provider.

#### What is FIT?

The fecal immunochemical test (FIT) has been used to screen for colon cancer in Ontario since 2018. It is a test that effectively detects microscopic amounts of blood in the stool.

“It is an easy, painless test that you can do in privacy of your own home,” explains Dr. Green. “The test is delivered by mail to your home and you can either drop the sample off at your local Life Labs or mail the sample back using the envelope provided to you within the test kit.”

Once you get the FIT kit, there are simple instructions that help guide you through the process.

#### How to get a FIT kit

The easiest way is to speak with your family doctor or nurse practitioner about getting checked for colon cancer with a FIT kit. If you do not have a primary care provider, you can visit the Screen for

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Life Coach if it visits your community or call Health811 by dialing 811 to get a FIT kit sent to your home.

If you would like to learn more about where to get screened or receive a test, visit [www.tbrhsc.net/cancerscreening](http://www.tbrhsc.net/cancerscreening).

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*Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC), a 425-bed academic specialized acute care facility, is a national leader in Patient and Family Centred Care. As the only tertiary care provider in Northwestern Ontario, we provide comprehensive services to a population of over 250,000 residents in a region the size of France. Effectively addressing the health care needs of patients and families has earned us both Innovation Awards and Leading Practice Designations. As an academic health sciences centre, we teach the next generation of health care providers and advance medical research. Patients benefit from interprofessional teams of dedicated health care providers and access to leading-edge medical technology and clinical trials. To fulfill its teaching and research strategic goals, TBRHSC is supported by Thunder Bay Regional Health Research Institute (TBRHRI) as a not-for-profit and independent research corporation. TBRHRI is the research arm of TBRHSC and seeks to lead research to improve the health outcome of the people of Northwestern Ontario and beyond.*