

COVID-19 Pandemic Altered Patient Attitudes Towards At-Home Colorectal Cancer Screening

A survey finds that 30% more people participated in stool-based tests for colorectal cancer compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

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At the American College of Surgeons, Clinical Congress 2021, in October, 2021, Kristine Kenning, MD, chief general surgery resident at Virginia Commonwealth University, presented [results from a survey](#) among 765 age-eligible (50 and older) adults for colorectal cancer (CRC) screening. Her team found that about 30% more of those who participated on the survey had completed stool-based tests when compared to before the pandemic.

The study also looked at how barriers to screening changed before and after the pandemic. They found about a 5% increase in the percentage of unemployed respondents, from 2.6% to 7.4%. Of the 41% of respondents who were concerned about co-pays, 57.6% said they delayed undergoing screening as a consequence.

It was also found that:

- 59% of respondents delayed their colonoscopy out of concern for COVID-19 exposure
- 48.1% were open to at-home fecal occult blood tests (FOBT) as an alternative
- 93% of them would get a follow up colonoscopy if the FOBT was positive

FOBT analyses blood in feces that is not visible to the naked eye. A positive result for this test would indicate lesions present in the digestive tract.

Impact of the Pandemic

Perception towards at-home tests and colonoscopies have changed as a result of the pandemic. More people now than before are uncomfortable undergoing a colonoscopy because of the associated costs and potential for exposure to COVID-19. At-home tests such as FOBTs may be potential alternatives to a colonoscopy.

Dr. Kenning explained the significance of her research findings in the Clinical Congress 2021 [press](#)

[release](#). “The key message from our findings is that barriers to screening have increased during the pandemic, and we have to find a way to work with the community to increase those rates. Our study found that people are compliant with, and willing to do, home-based fecal occult blood testing. This test provides a very important way for us to increase screening for colorectal cancer.”

Dr. Kenning noted that a larger survey is in the planning with principal investigator Carrie Miller, PhD, MPH, to further explore the changes in attitudes towards CRC screening. — Gargi Patel

Gargi Patel is a Colon Cancer Prevention Intern with the [Colon Cancer Foundation](#).

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