

January 2025

**Hundreds of thousands more people will be sent a home-testing kit that can help to detect signs of bowel cancer, as the NHS expands its lifesaving screening programme to those aged 50 in England.**

People aged 50 and 52 are now starting to automatically receive a home test kit every two years by post when they become eligible, marking the final phase of the NHS ambition to offer everyone 50-74 the screening test. Around 850,000 additional people in England a year will be eligible for the screening test, with over 4 million more people invited since roll out began in 2021. The NHS is also calling on more people to take up the potentially lifesaving offer, as figures show that uptake is lower in those aged 54 – 59 – with less than 60% of 54–57-year-olds having taken up the offer, compared to over 70% returning their FIT kits in the 60-74 range. **Professor Peter Johnson, national clinical director for cancer at NHS England said:** “Thousands of people in England develop bowel cancer each year, and there are concerns that it is becoming more common for people in their 50’s – but what we do know is that the chances of surviving it are very good when it is caught early, which is why the NHS is sending out millions of free bowel cancer screening kits for people to use in the comfort of their own homes, and we urge everyone invited to take part. Early detection of bowel cancer, the third most common type of cancer in England, can significantly improve treatment outcomes. “There is no need to feel embarrassed about poo – the test is quick and simple to use and can detect signs of bowel cancer, often before symptoms appear, so please do return your FIT kit if you are sent one. If anyone experiences symptoms such as blood in their poo or severe stomach pain, no matter their age, they should speak to their GP and get it checked out as soon as possible.”

**Dr Lisa Wilde, Director of Research and External Affairs at Bowel Cancer UK, said:** “Screening is one of the best ways to spot bowel cancer at an early stage, when it is treatable and curable. In fact, more than nine in ten people survive bowel cancer when it’s diagnosed at the earliest stage. That’s why it’s so fantastic to see the NHS screening programme expanding to include those aged 50 and above in England. This is something we have long campaigned for, and we’re sure that the bowel cancer community will be thrilled that more people are now eligible for this lifesaving screening test.” People can call the free bowel cancer screening helpline for advice on **0800 707 60 60**. Information on bowel cancer and the screening programme can be found on the [nhs.uk website](https://www.nhs.uk).

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**Hospitals ‘jammed’ following busiest week for NHS this winter**

New data published shows that more hospital beds were occupied last week (w/e 12 Jan) than at any point so far this winter (97,636), with 96% of adult general and acute hospital beds occupied. In the same week, almost 1 in 7 occupied hospital beds (13,585) were taken up by patients who were fit to be discharged.

Flu cases in hospital are down from their peak, but England’s leading emergency doctor has warned today that hospitals are ‘not out of the woods yet’, with flu rates still 3.5 times higher than last year – 4,929 patients were in hospital with flu on average each day last week. As winter viruses and cold weather continue to create enormous pressure on front line services – leading many hospitals to declare critical incidents – there were also 1,112 patients in hospital with Covid on average every day last week. There were also 650 norovirus patients, up 4% on the previous week and up 44% on last year, as well as almost double the number of children in hospital with RSV compared with the same week last year (52 vs 27).

**Professor Julian Redhead, NHS National Clinical Director for Urgent and Emergency Care said:** “While it is encouraging news that flu cases are no longer increasing, hospitals are not out of the woods yet.

“Staff are working incredibly hard in sometimes challenging surroundings, but winter viruses are much higher than usual for this time of year, and this coupled with the cold snap and problems discharging patients means hospitals are jam-packed with patients – even as more beds have been opened to manage increased demand.

“With pressures on hospitals still formidable, it’s vital people continue to use NHS services in the normal way – using 111 and 111 online if you need advice and support for health conditions and only using 999 or attend A&E in life-threatening emergencies.”

**Health and Social Care Secretary, Wes Streeting said:** “Despite NHS staff doing their level best, the experiences of patients this winter are unacceptable. Annual winter pressures, which will always exist, should not automatically lead to an annual winter crisis.

“We have ended the strikes, so for the first winter in 3 years staff are on the front line not the picket line, and introduced protected more patients with flu vaccinations than last year, but there is much more to do.

“It will take time to turn the health service around so patients receive the standards of care they deserve, but it can be done. Through our Plan for Change this government is making the investment and fundamental reform needed to make sure the NHS can be there for us when we need it, once again.”

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