

MAJORITY OF CANADIANS SURVEYED NOT CHECKING FOR COLON CANCER

Largest survey of its kind finds many Canadians understand they need to get checked for colon cancer, but are not taking action.

January 7, 2010 – Toronto – A new national survey reveals that while almost all Canadians understand the importance of getting checked for colon cancer, most have not had a screening test and are confused about how and when it should happen. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer for both men and women – in 2009 an estimated 22,000 Canadians were diagnosed with it and 9,000 died.ⁱ It is also one of the most highly treatable cancers if caught early.

“Checking regularly for colon cancer – also known as screening – is our best line of defence for catching this highly treatable cancer early. The survey shows almost all Canadians understand that this is the case – this is good news,” says Dr. Heather Bryant, Vice-President, Cancer Control, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. “While the number of Canadians getting screened for colon cancer is on the rise, the survey demonstrates the majority of Canadians at risk are still not actually getting checked for colon cancer. It’s very important to understand that screening means having a test when a person feels perfectly well and is not experiencing symptoms. ”

The *Colon Cancer Screening in Canada* survey polled 3,153 Canadians aged 45 to 74 years regarding their understanding and attitudes towards getting checked for colon cancer. Commissioned by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer’s National Colorectal Cancer Screening Network, it was conducted by Angus Reid Public Opinion in partnership with The Applied Health Research Centre at St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto.

“We know screening works,” says Heather Chappell, Director, Cancer Control Policy, Canadian Cancer Society, and a member of the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Network. “Scientific evidence shows that colon cancer deaths could be significantly reduced if Canadians between the ages of 50 and 74 had a stool test every two years. Based on 2009 statistics, about 1,500 lives each year could be saved if a greater percentage of Canadians were screened. The survey findings will be extremely valuable in determining more effective ways to encourage people to get checked for colon cancer.”

It’s important for all Canadians 50 years of age and older to get checked for colon cancer before signs and symptoms appear. Screening is not just for those with a family history of the disease – almost 80 per cent of people diagnosed with colon cancer have no family history of the disease.ⁱⁱ

Colon Cancer Screening in Canada Survey Highlights

Canadians have a good understanding of the benefits of checking for colon cancer:

- The majority, 95 per cent, of Canadians aged 50 to 74 agree that detecting colon cancer early greatly improves the chances of survival. A further 92 per cent agree that if caught early enough, colon cancer can be treated successfully, while 91 per cent also believe that a test is a small price to pay for such a large potential health benefit.
- Additionally, 68 per cent of the respondents are aware that being over 50 puts them at greater risk of colorectal cancer and 84 per cent think that people their age should get checked.

Despite these statistics, there is a disconnect between Canadians' understanding and the action they are taking:

- Despite high levels of awareness, the survey shows that 56 per cent of Canadians aged 50 to 74 are not up-to-date with their screening; up-to-date screening means within the last two years for fecal occult blood tests (FOBT) and within the last five years for colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy. Sixty per cent do not realize they should actually be checked before signs or symptoms are present.

Conversation is critical:

- Nearly 70 per cent could not recall ever having a conversation with their doctor about getting checked for colon cancer.
- The survey highlighted that a discussion with a doctor about colon cancer is the strongest driver of screening.

Growing number of Canadians getting checked

The *Colon Cancer Screening in Canada* survey found that 44 per cent of Canadians aged 50 to 74 report up-to-date screening either using a stool test that can be done at home (FOBT) or an internal examination (colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy) that is done in a medical facility. This finding is consistent with Statistic Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) finding that in 2008 about 40 per cent of Canadians aged 50 to 74 reported that they had had a FOBT in the past two years or colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy in the past five years.ⁱⁱⁱ There has been an average six per cent increase in screening rates from 2005 to 2008 in provinces and territories for which these data are available.^{iv}

"There are many terrific awareness programs in this country that drive home the message about the importance of checking and knowing when you should be checked for colon cancer, and the Colon Cancer Screening in Canada survey – building on what we have seen from the CCHS – shows that we are having an impact on the numbers of people who are taking action," says Dr. Maura Ricketts, Director in the Office for Public Health, Canadian Medical Association and member of the Network. "The survey also shows we still have work to do. We need to continue to talk about the importance of screening, and helping Canadians understand their role in maintaining health and well-being so more people across the country get checked and fewer people will get colon cancer."

About Colon Cancer Screening

Getting checked, or being screened, for colon cancer is a method of disease prevention and early detection. Screening or testing is done when a person has no signs or symptoms of the disease. Because colon cancer – also known as colorectal or bowel cancer – almost always develops from a benign or non-cancerous polyp, the disease can often be prevented when these polyps are discovered early and removed.

There are a number of tests that check for colon cancer. Non-invasive stool tests, such as FOBT and Fecal Immunochemical Tests (FIT), look for blood released by fragile blood vessels in polyps.

"A stool test is a simple and effective approach to screening for colon cancer. For individuals with a positive test, we can then look more closely at whether it is a sign of cancer or pre-cancer," says Dr. Heather Bryant. "Those who are at higher than average risk of developing colon cancer may have a different approach recommended by their doctor."

If positive, an internal examination of the colon is recommended and is called a colonoscopy, which examines the entire length of the colon. The examination is done with a thin, flexible tube containing a light and a video camera that can be connected to a display monitor. Any polyps or other abnormalities can be biopsied and sent to a laboratory to determine if cancer cells are present.

“As a colon cancer survivor, I know first-hand the impact of a cancer diagnosis. I encourage everyone over the age of 50 to get checked for colon cancer. If you have a family member or a friend over 50, encourage them as well,” says Barry Stein, colon cancer survivor and President of the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada. “Our goal with this awareness program is to provide necessary information and tools to Canadians to encourage more people to be screened for colon cancer. It should be part of your health routine. Colon cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable and you can avoid the challenges of fighting this disease through a simple test.”

For More Information

For more information about colon cancer or how to get checked, please visit:

- The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer’s website www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca
- The Canadian Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333 or www.cancer.ca
- The Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada at www.colorectal-cancer.ca; 1-877-502-6566

About the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Network

Established by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer in 2007, the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Network is building momentum towards a shared approach to colorectal cancer screening across the country. Programs are shared to support improved quality and consistency as each province and territory develops its own screening program, evaluation methods, quality initiatives and outreach. At present, membership includes program staff, provincial and territorial government representatives and representatives from the Canadian Cancer Society, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Cancer Action Network, Canadian Medical Association, Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada and Canadian Association of Gastroenterology.

This survey is the first step in a new program to help educate Canadians 50 to 74 years of age about how and when to get checked for colon cancer.

About The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer is an independent organization funded by the federal government to accelerate action on cancer control for all Canadians. Bringing together cancer survivors, patients and families, cancer experts and government representatives to implement the first pan-Canadian cancer control strategy, the vision is to be a driving force to achieve a focused approach that will help prevent cancer, enhance the quality of life of those affected by cancer, lessen the likelihood of dying from cancer, and increase the efficiency of cancer control in Canada.

For more information about the Partnership, please visit www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca. Anyone interested in learning about cancer control is also invited to visit the Partnership’s online community at cancerview.ca.

About Angus Reid Public Opinion

Angus Reid Public Opinion is a practice of Vision Critical—a global research and technology company. Vision Critical is now one of the largest market research enterprises in the world. In addition to its five offices in Canada—located in Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Toronto, and Montreal—the firm also has offices in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, Paris and Sydney. Its team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research, including health, and currently serves over 200 international clients.

About St. Michael's Hospital

St. Michael's Hospital provides compassionate care to all who walk through its doors. The Hospital also provides outstanding medical education to future health care professionals in more than 23 academic disciplines. Critical care and trauma, heart disease, neurosurgery, diabetes, cancer care, and care of the homeless are among the Hospital's recognized areas of expertise. Through the Keenan Research Centre and the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, research at St. Michael's Hospital is recognized and put into practice around the world. Founded in 1892, the Hospital is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto.

The Applied Health Research Center (AHRC) is a full-service academic research organization. The AHRC is committed to achieving better answers for better health by transforming clinical research. With world renowned leadership, breadth of experience and services it responds to the comprehensive needs and quality expectations of Canadian and international investigators and other partners. The AHRC is part of the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute at St. Michael's Hospital.

Survey Methodology

The *Colon Cancer Screening in Canada* survey was conducted from March 10th to April 17th, 2009 by Angus Reid Public Opinion and the Applied Health Research Centre at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. The study was conducted using a telephone random digit dial methodology. A total of 3,153 Canadians 45-74 were randomly surveyed. The margin of error which measures sampling variability is +/- 2.1%. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure the sample is representative of the entire adult population 45-74 in Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding^v.

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ⁱ Canadian Cancer Statistics 2009. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/canada-wide/about%20cancer/cancer%20statistics/~/_media/CCS/Canada%20wide/Files%20List/English%20files%20heating/pdf%20not%20in%20publications%20section/Stats%202009E%20Cdn%20Cancer.ashx. Accessed on October 16, 2009.

ⁱⁱ American Cancer Society;

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_2X_What_are_the_risk_factors_for_colon_and_rectum_cancer.asp.

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2008. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090630/dq090630c-eng.htm>. Statistics Canada: Custom Tabulations.

^{iv} Ibid

^v Go to <http://www.visioncritical.com/angus-reid-public-opinion/colon-cancer-screening-in-canada> for more information about the Colon Cancer Screening in Canada Survey, as well as the specific survey questions.