

Low return rate: Gold Coasters encouraged to complete their life-saving bowel screening kits

25 June 2019

Gold Coast Primary Health Network and Gold Coast Health are reminding local residents of the importance of completing their free bowel screening kits, in light of recent statistics, showing lower than average return rates.

In 2016/2017 the Gold Coast participation rate in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program was 2.1 per cent lower than the national participation rate and 1.6 percent lower than the Queensland participation rate.

During that period, 103 000 Gold Coast residents were mailed the kit and just over 40 000 were sent back for testing, which is a return rate of 39.2 per cent, an increase of 3 per cent in the last three years.

Gold Coast Primary Health Network Board Chair and local GP, Dr David Rowlands, said while it was encouraging that rates were increasing, residents needed to understand that the screening kits could save their life, as they can detect microscopic amounts of blood in stool samples.

“It’s a simple test that you can do, in the privacy of your own home, that’s designed to detect any blood in your bowel motions which can be an indicator of bowel cancer or other underlying conditions,” Dr Rowlands said.

“I always encourage my patients not to delay completing their screening kit. It’s important that this is completed when it’s received, every two years, in case things have changed since their last result.”

Every two years, all Australians aged between 50-74 and who have a current Medicare or DVA card, will receive a screening kit in the mail. Local teacher Michael Montgomerie was one of these people.

“I had just turned 50 and received the kit in the mail. I completed it straight away, they found something wrong, I then had a colonoscopy and they found bowel cancer,” Michael said.

“I had few symptoms, keep fit and healthy, don’t smoke and there’s no history of bowel cancer in my family.

“It’s now been successfully treated, but if wasn’t for doing that screening test, I probably wouldn’t be here.”

Gold Coast Health Promotion Officer with the Bowel Cancer Screening Program, Liz Cramb, said that bowel cancer is the third most common type of newly diagnosed cancer in Australia, and second highest cause of cancer death.

“In 2019 it is predicted that 16,398 Australians will be diagnosed with bowel cancer and 5,597 people will lose their lives to the disease. That's over 100 deaths every week. One in 13 Australians will be diagnosed by age 85, the majority of whom will be aged 50 or older,” Liz said.

“Over 90 per cent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated if they are diagnosed early. However, fewer than 50 per cent of cases are currently diagnosed early and the cancer may be present for many years but display no symptoms until a more advanced stage, when treatment may not be as effective.

“We want to change those statistics, which is why our message for local residents is simple – complete the test when you receive it,” Liz said.

Michael said while the test may not be the most pleasant thing, it's quick and easy and can be done at home.

“At the end of the day, it's no big deal. Bowel cancer – now that's a much bigger deal.”

Anyone who would like further information or requires a replacement test, can phone the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program helpline on 1800 118 868 during office hours.

For more information about the program visit: www.cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel

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