

Echo Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Take part in colorectal cancer screening and adopt healthy lifestyle

The Controller of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui, today (March 3) urged members of the public to support Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month by adopting a healthy lifestyle and undergoing regular screenings to prevent colorectal cancer.

"The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization has recognised March as Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month every year to highlight the importance of screening for colorectal cancer, as well as to promote healthy lifestyle habits to reduce a person's risk of developing colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer locally and the second most common cause of cancer death. In 2022, there were 5 190 newly diagnosed cases, and colorectal cancer led to 2 270 deaths. It is important for the public to be more aware of cancer prevention," he said.

The primary prevention of cancer is to adopt a healthy lifestyle, while screening is a tool for secondary prevention to detect and treat precancerous lesions or early-stage cancers before symptoms appear, thereby increasing the cure rate.

"The DH encourages all asymptomatic Hong Kong residents aged between 50 and 75 to join the Government-subsidised Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP) as early as possible and to undergo screening tests every two years in the private sector. Participants should first attend a medical consultation provided by an enrolled primary care doctor (PCD) and receive a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) screening arranged by the PCD. If the test result is positive, the participant will be referred to an enrolled colonoscopy specialist to receive a colonoscopy examination subsidised by the Government. If the test result is negative, the participant is advised to repeat the screening two years later," Dr Tsui said.

The CRCSP has been operating smoothly since its launch in 2016. Last year, there were around 86 000 new participants in the CRCSP, a record annual high since its launch. As of the end of 2024, the total number of eligible participants was approximately 510 000. A cumulative total of about 77 000 persons had positive FIT screening results, about 40 000 persons were diagnosed to have colorectal adenomas after colonoscopy examinations, and about 3 400 persons had colorectal cancer. Among the colorectal cancer cases diagnosed under the CRCSP, a preliminary analysis of around 2 400 cases has been done, and about 56 per cent of these cases were in earlier stages and therefore had a more favourable prognosis.

The CRCSP is heavily subsidised by the Government. As of the end of 2024, around 1 090 PCDs have enrolled in the CRCSP, covering about 2 070

locations, and about 97 per cent of these locations will not charge any additional payment for the consultation or the FIT screening. Around 260 colonoscopy specialists have also joined the CRCSP. The colonoscopy specialists can only charge participants a co-payment of no more than \$1,000 for providing standard colonoscopy examination services. Currently, colonoscopy examination services are available at about 780 service locations, with over 70 per cent of these locations not charging any additional payment for colonoscopy and polyp removal.

"The DH released the latest Health Behaviour Survey this January, which revealed that unhealthy but modifiable practices are common among the Hong Kong population. For example, 14.8 per cent of the adult population performed an insufficient level of physical activity, 97.0 per cent of the public had an inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables, and 2.7 per cent of the population (aged 15 or above) engaged in binge drinking at least monthly. These are important risk factors for developing common non-communicable diseases, including cancer. To prevent colorectal cancer, members of the public are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and practices, including exercising regularly, eating two servings of fruits and three servings of vegetables daily, reducing the consumption of red meat and processed meat, maintaining a healthy body weight, and avoiding smoking and alcohol," Dr Tsui added.

At the same time, the Primary Healthcare Commission is actively promoting the Life Course Preventive Care Plan via District Health Centres (DHCs), DHC Expresses and family doctors. Based on the core principles of prevention-oriented and whole-person care, a personalised preventive care plan will be formulated to address the health needs of citizens across different life stages with reference to the latest evidence. Family doctors and primary healthcare professionals will collaborate to provide health advice and education on chronic disease and cancer screening, as well as healthy lifestyles according to personal factors, including recommendations on colorectal cancer screening for those aged 50 or above.

For more information on the CRCSP (including eligibility criteria and the list of PCDs), please visit the DH's thematic website www.colonscreen.gov.hk, or call 3565 6288 during office hours.