

Resuming Cancer Screening During COVID-19

Ontario's health care system has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. Cancer screening was paused in March 2020 because of the pandemic, and gradually started to resume after the Chief Medical Officer of Health's Directive 2 for healthcare providers was amended in late May 2020. Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) runs the province's organized cancer screening programs, the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP), the Ontario Cervical Screening Program (OCSP) and ColonCancerCheck (CCC). Ontario Health released Tip Sheets to support the gradual resumption of breast, colorectal and cervical screening in June 2020, and most recently, has updated the [Tip Sheet for primary care providers](#). Tip Sheets have also been developed for Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) sites, colposcopy, and endoscopy. Guidance in the [Tip Sheets](#) is based on the best available evidence as well as expert opinion.

Ontario's primary care providers (PCPs) play an important role in preventive care including cancer screening. Here are some tips based on Ontario Health's guidance to help PCPs make decisions about cancer screening in the coming months.

- **Breast screening:** while a referral from primary care is not required for screening through the Ontario Breast Screening Program, providers can provide support by talking to their patients who are due or overdue for screening about their breast screening options.
- **Cervical screening:** If in-person office visits can be conducted safely, providers can resume routine cervical screening. If routine screening cannot be provided in your practice, we encourage you to target and prioritize certain populations that may be at an increased risk. This includes people who are immunocompromised, and people discharged from colposcopy with persistent low-grade cytology. While formal program guidelines currently recommend starting screening at age 21, Ontario Health encourages PCPs to start cervical screening for patients at age 25 in alignment with best [new evidence](#).
- **Colorectal cancer screening:** the fecal immunochemical test (FIT) remains available through ColonCancerCheck (CCC) and LifeLabs. As a reminder, patients at average risk of colorectal cancer should be screened with FIT, rather than colonoscopy. In addition, patients with previous low risk adenomas should return to average risk screening with FIT five years after their colonoscopy instead of continued surveillance with colonoscopy (see [CCC guidelines](#)).
- **Screening Activity Report (SAR):** the SAR is an online tool provided by Ontario Health that is available to primary care physicians who practice as part of a patient enrolment model. The SAR provides cancer screening data and identifies people who are eligible for screening or require follow-up. For information on how to register, visit the [Ontario Health website](#).
- **Primary care electronic medical records (EMRs):** Ontario Health partnered with OntarioMD on a [blog](#) on EMR tips to identify higher-priority patients for cancer screening.

As Ontario continues to recover from COVID-19, and catches up on preventive care including cancer screening, tools like the Ontario Health Tip Sheets, reports like the SAR and those in EMRs, can support primary care practices.

Please contact Ontario Health if you have any questions: cancerinfo@ontariohealth.ca.