

Important information to consider before requesting a Fecal Occult Blood (FOB) test:

An FOB test is primarily used in the realm of Colon Cancer Screening. This is provided in Nova Scotia, under a regulated environment as part of the Colon Cancer Screening Program (CCSP), using a sensitive immunochemical method (FIT). For more information go to:

<http://www.cancercare.ns.ca/en/home/preventionscreening/coloncancerprevention/default.aspx>

The FOB Guaiac method used outside of the CCSP should not be used for screening for colon cancer. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the sensitivity of the FIT test for detection of colon cancer is at least twice that of the FOB Guaiac method, hence the latter may provide false reassurances. Patients with a high suspicion or risk of colon cancer and who do not qualify for the CCSP may best be assessed by the Gastroenterology team.

Other potential causes for bleeding from the gastrointestinal tract cannot be effectively ruled out by a FOB test, particularly if there is a high index of clinical suspicion e.g. anemia of undetermined origin. In these cases, if all other causes of anemia have been ruled out, and even if the FOB is negative, an assessment by the gastrointestinal team may be warranted. Moreover, FOB is not indicated for diagnosing inflammatory bowel disease.

In light of the above, we strongly encourage you to limit the use of this test and interpret the results with caution. Also, patients should be advised to follow the correct instructions for the collection of samples and the test cards must only be processed in the CDHA laboratory and not in any clinic, since this raises a serious quality issue which has been identified by Accreditation Canada 2013.

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