



Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref: WQ83560 & WQ83561

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Dear Janet,

Thank you for your recent Written Questions asking me to provide a date for when the review of offering bowel screening self-referral to people over 74 years of age will commence. You also asked me to make a statement on the finding by Cancer Research UK that more than 4 in 10 new cases of bowel cancer were in people 75 and over.

The Welsh Government's policy is to follow the independent, expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) which recommends routine screening for men and women aged between 50 and 74.

The bowel screening programme currently offers screening to men and women aged 60 to 74. Work to reduce the starting age for bowel screening, in line with UK NSC recommendation has already commenced with men and women aged 58 and 59 starting to receive invitations as of 11 October. My written statement of 11 October has further details: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-optimising-wales-bowel-screening-programme>. The intention is to expand the age range to people aged 50 and to increase the test sensitivity over the next few years. We will do this in a phased and planned manner, according to colonoscopy capacity. It is essential that anyone with a positive screening test is able to access colonoscopy in a timely way.

The capacity within endoscopy services has been exacerbated by the pandemic and made it more difficult to meet the current demand for urgent cancer investigations, screening and surveillance procedures. Our priority, therefore, must be to first make asymptomatic population screening available to all those within the recommended age cohort.

The primary risk factor for cancer is ageing, with higher rates of cancer among older cohorts of the population. The asymptomatic screening programme, in combination with symptomatic presentation, makes possible the detection of the majority of people with bowel cancer among people under the age of 75.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

However, until recently more than 40% of the eligible population did not participate in the bowel screening programme. Therefore, it is understandable that large percentage of bowel cancers would be identified symptomatically among people who are beyond the upper age threshold for bowel screening. Anyone over the UK NSC recommended population screening age group with symptoms of cancer can receive appropriate investigation on clinical grounds – this approach is designed to reduce potential unintended adverse effects of a screening programme.

It is important we focus our efforts on encouraging those in the existing eligible age cohort to take up the offer of asymptomatic screening when invited. People with clinical presentations will continue to be offered urgent suspected cancer pathway management.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

**Eluned Morgan AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services