

Want to raise colon cancer screening rates? Run a lottery

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VA study found 20 percent boost in uptake if patients thought they might also win \$50.

(HealthDay)—A lottery could be an effective means of getting people engaged in potentially lifesaving colon cancer screening, a new study suggests.

The study focused on a noninvasive, at-home stool test called the [fecal occult blood](#) test. The test—which can detect small amounts of blood in stool that may be an early sign of [colon cancer](#)—requires patients to collect a small sample of their stool and mail it off to a lab.

Experts currently recommend that people over age 50 take the test once a year, but only about one-third of patients who are prescribed the home kit actually use it.

The new study involved more than 1,500 patients at the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center who were prescribed the test.

"Fecal occult blood tests are inexpensive and an effective way to find colon cancer early and save lives," Dr. Jeffrey Kullgren, a research scientist in the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in Michigan, and an assistant professor of [internal medicine](#) at the University of Michigan Medical School, said in a university news release.

"It's up to the patient, however, to do this test at home and unfortunately, completion rates are low," he added.

However, when patients were offered a one-in-10 chance of winning \$50 if they used the test, test completion rates rose by 20 percent, the study found.

"Our study is another example of how modest financial incentives may go a long way in improving health behaviors and health care quality," Kullgren said. "Integrating a small lottery incentive into usual care is a low-cost tool with potential to promote patients' use of a service proven to save lives by catching cancer early."

According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer is the third leading cancer killer in the United States, with more than 50,000 lives lost to the disease each year.

The findings were published Nov. 17 in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more about [colorectal cancer screening](#).

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