Fecal occult blood testing tied to reduction in colorectal cancer mortality

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Routine screening with fecal occult blood testing (FOBT) is associated with a decrease in colorectal cancer (CRC) mortality, according to a study published online Feb. 27 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Johannes Blom, M.D., Ph.D., from the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, and colleagues evaluated cancer-specific mortality associated with early versus late or no invitation for routine CRC screening using FOBT. The analysis included 203,670 individuals invited early and 175,778 invited late or not at all (control group).

The researchers found that the mean screening participation rate was 63.3 percent during a maximum of 14 years of follow-up. In the early invitation group, there were 834 CRC deaths in more than 2.19 million person-years versus 889 CRC deaths in roughly 2.25 million person-years in the control group, yielding a lower risk for CRC mortality with CRC screening (rate ratio, 0.86), as well as a lower risk for excess mortality (rate ratio, 0.84).

"Our results have an important public health implication in suggesting that organized population-based CRC screening with FOBT has the potential to save lives worldwide," the authors write.

"By using fecal immunochemical testing as a screening test, with a higher sensitivity and participation rate than guaiac-based FOBT, more lives could be saved, but adherence to prompt follow-up colonoscopies after a positive test result is essential."

More information: Johannes Blom et al, Routine Fecal Occult Blood Screening and Colorectal Cancer Mortality in Sweden, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.0516