



Faecal Occult Blood (FOB) Testing

The purpose of this clinical update is to clarify recent changes around laboratory acceptance criteria for FOB testing. This change has caused a degree of concern and several queries from laboratory users. An initial [Clinical Update](#) with regards to this issue was published in November 2014.

FOB testing is at present **only** indicated in the screening of an asymptomatic "average risk" population for colorectal carcinoma. It should not be used to dictate referral for further GI investigation in symptomatic patients. It is too insensitive for this purpose. This approach is reflected in current local, national and international guidelines (see references at the bottom).

In order to ensure clinically appropriate testing, a few restrictions have been placed on the use of FOB testing for Pathlab BOP, Pathlab Waikato and Laboratory Services Rotorua users, detailed as below. Note that the faecal immunochemical test (FIT) is used locally, using Abs to human haemoglobin to pick up the target antigen.

- 1) FOB requests are not accepted when the clinical details suggest an acute gastrointestinal illness.
- 2) FOB requests are not accepted when requested in conjunction with other enteric requests that are suggestive of an acute gastrointestinal illness (i.e. bacterial culture).
- 3) FOB requests in patients with anaemia or iron deficiency anaemia are not accepted.
- 4) Serial or repeated FOB requests are not accepted, with only one request per patient permitted every two years.
- 5) FOB requests in patients under 50 years of age are not accepted.

There has been widespread discussion with Gastroenterologists and Surgeons, individually and collectively, which has shown a high level of support for this policy.

If you have a patient which falls into one of the categories above, but where you still feel FOB testing may be clinically indicated, please discuss the case beforehand with a Clinical Microbiologist or Gastroenterologist.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if any further clarification on this issue is required.

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References

- <http://gut.bmj.com/content/60/10/1309.long>
- <http://www.bpac.org.nz/Audits/colorectal-cancer.aspx>
- <http://www.bpac.org.nz/BT/2013/September/investigating-anaemia.aspx>
- <http://baynav.bopdhub.govt.nz/Pathways/Suspected-Bowel-Malignancy/>