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Variation in changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and association with screening uptake; an observational study.

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3 **Variation in changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and association**
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6 **with screening uptake; an observational study.**
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10
11
12
13 Gavin RC Clark, Annie S Anderson (0000-0002-0047-4500), Thomas G Godfrey, Judith
14
15 A Strachan, Callum G Fraser (0000-0002-1333-7994), Robert JC Steele (0000-0003-
16
17 4248-6785)
18

19
20
21
22
23 Information Services Division, NHS National Services Scotland, Edinburgh EH12 9EB,
24
25
26 Scotland, UK
27

28
29 Gavin RC Clark senior information analyst
30

31
32 Thomas G Godfrey information analyst
33

34
35 Centre for Public Health Nutrition, University of Dundee, Ninewells Hospital and Medical
36
37 School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK
38

39
40 Annie S Anderson professor
41

42
43 Department of Blood Sciences and Scottish Bowel Screening Laboratory, Ninewells
44
45 Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK
46

47
48 Judith A Strachan consultant clinical scientist
49

50
51 Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening, University of Dundee,
52
53 Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK
54
55
56
57
58
59

1
2
3 Callum G Fraser, honorary professor,
4

5
6 Robert JC Steele, senior research professor
7
8
9
10

11 **Emails:**
12

13
14
15 Gavin RC Clark, gavin.clark2@nhs.net
16

17
18 Annie S Anderson, a.s.anderson@dundee.ac.uk
19

20
21 Thomas G Godfrey, thomas.godfrey@nhs.net
22

23
24 Judith A Strachan, judith.strachan@nhs.net
25

26
27 Callum G Fraser, callum.fraser@nhs.net
28

29
30 Robert JC Steele, r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk
31

32
33
34
35
36 **Corresponding author:** Professor Robert JC Steele, Mailbox 4, Level 7, Ninewells
37
38 Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK.
39

40
41 **Email:** r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk
42

43
44 **Telephone:** + 44 (0)1382 3835444
45

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24 **Keywords:** adenoma, colorectal cancer, faecal occult blood test, incidence, screening
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30 **Abbreviations:** CRC: colorectal cancer, FIT: faecal immunochemical test for
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32 haemoglobin, gFOBT: guaiac faecal occult blood testing, HDI: human development
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34 index, RCT: randomised controlled trial, SBSDB: Scottish Bowel Screening Database,
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36 SCR: Scottish Cancer Registry, SEER: Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results,
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38 UK: United Kingdom, USA: United States of America
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Abstract

Objectives - In developed countries, the incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) has declined in the over 50 years age group, but increased in younger people. We studied incidence by age and the influence of screening uptake on CRC incidence.

Design - Age and sex-standardised incidence data for CRC from 1997 to 2017 were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry (SCR). In addition, linkage between the Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD) and the SCR allowed investigation of any association between screening participation and CRC incidence.

Setting – Scotland and the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme, in which guaiac faecal occult blood test screening was piloted from March 2000 and fully rolled by December 2009.

Participants – From the introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 were invited to participate, of whom 1,487,999 participated at least once.

Main outcome measures – Incidence of CRC.

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3 **Results** - In the screening age range (50-74 years), CRC incidence peaked at 156.5
4 cases per 100,000 in 2010 after full roll-out of screening across Scotland but fell to
5 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017. However, under 50 years, there was a rise of from 5.3
6 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8 per 100,000 in 2017. When CRC incidence was
7 examined in those who had been offered screening, incidence fell in the participant
8 group more than in the non-participant group after roll-out of screening was complete.
9 Analysis of cumulative incidence demonstrated that CRC incidence in the participant
10 group remained consistently below that of the non-participant from around seven years
11 of follow-up.
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28 **Conclusions** - The incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) in Scotland has declined in
29 the over 50 years age groups, but increased in younger people. Population screening
30 has likely contributed to the reduction in CRC incidence in the over 50 years age group.
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- We examine age and sex-standardised incidence data for colorectal cancer for the years 1997 to 2017 obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry and linkage between the Registry and the Scottish Bowel Screening Database.
- We are able to show previously unreported changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer in Scotland in all age groups.
- We are able to examine in detail, for the first time, if population-based screening using faecal occult blood tests affects incidence of colorectal cancer.
- Associations between incidence and plausible reasons for the changes over time will help establish future helpful interventions.
- Although this was a large study, we did not examine incidence by yearly age, only in three large groups.

Introduction

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is a major health problem worldwide. In Scotland, it is currently the third most commonly diagnosed non-cutaneous cancer and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths.¹ However, the incidence of CRC varies widely across the world and it is estimated that 60% of CRC deaths occur in those countries with a high or very high human development index (HDI).² Western lifestyle factors including obesity, lack of physical exercise, a diet rich in red and processed meat, smoking, and alcohol have all been linked to the risk of developing CRC,³ and marked increases in both incidence and mortality have been observed in many medium-high HDI countries, especially in Asia, South America and Eastern Europe.² However, both incidence and mortality have either stabilised or declined in countries with the highest HDI, e.g., Australia, New Zealand, United States of America (USA), and several Western European countries.⁴ At least in part, these reductions in mortality may be attributed to improved access to high quality treatment and earlier diagnosis through both screening and through prompt investigation of those presenting with symptoms.

The declines in incidence are not so easy to explain, especially since the frequency of obesity continues to rise in all high HDI countries.⁵ However, there is now good

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3 evidence, largely from the USA and particularly from the Surveillance, Epidemiology
4 and End Results (SEER) database that, while incidence has been falling since around
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evidence, largely from the USA and particularly from the Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) database that, while incidence has been falling since around 1985 in those aged 50 years and over, it has been rising in those under 50 years since the mid-1990s.³ It has been postulated that screening may be responsible for the reduction in incidence in the group aged over 50 years, especially where this is associated with high rates of large bowel endoscopy, which facilitates the diagnosis and removal of pre-malignant adenoma.³ Since there is now robust evidence from randomised trials of endoscopic screening that removal of adenoma leads to a reduction in CRC incidence,⁶ this is an attractive hypothesis, but one that is difficult to test.

In Scotland, CRC screening, initially using biennial guaiac faecal occult blood tests (gFOBT), was rolled out to the whole of the population aged 50-74 years in 2007 after a three screening rounds pilot which started in 2000.^{7,8} In addition, Scotland, along with the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), is ranked as having a very high HDI,² has a high incidence of CRC,¹ and lifestyle factors associated with CRC are prevalent in the population.⁹ We therefore examined the incidence of CRC between 1997 and 2017 in the 50-74 years screening age range, the post-screening age range, and the pre-screening age range. In addition, the effect of screening participation was assessed.

Methods

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3 In Scotland, screening for CRC using biennial gFOBT, offered to everyone in the 50-69
4 years age range and registered with a general practitioner, commenced in March 2000
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6 with a pilot involving three of the fourteen NHS Boards responsible for routine health
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8 care. Roll-out to the rest of Scotland began in July 2007 and was completed by
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10 December 2009. The age range was also extended up to age 74 years for the whole of
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12 Scotland during roll-out. Details of the pilot, roll-out and descriptions of the screening
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14 algorithms have been published previously.^{7,8} Data are collected centrally by the
15
16 Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland and held in the
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18 Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD).
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28 To assess changes in the incidence of CRC in different age ranges around the time of
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30 the introduction of screening, data were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry
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32 (SCR) for the years 1997 to 2017. Crude incidence rates were calculated by sex and
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34 five-year age group using mid-year population estimates from the National Records of
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36 Scotland (NRS). These rates were then directly standardised using the 2013 European
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38 Standard Population. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated separately for the
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40 screening (50-74 years), post-screening (75 years and higher), and pre-screening
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42 (under 50 years) age ranges.
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50 To investigate the impact of screening participation on incidence, linkage was carried
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52 out between the SBSBD, the SCR and NRS deaths. The SBSBD allowed identification of
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54 those invited for screening and those who participated. Participants who received a
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3 positive or negative screening test result at any point were included in the participant
4 cohort. Those who did not receive a positive or negative test result, or never returned a
5 completed test, were included in the non-participant cohort. Data were included from the
6 pilot through to national roll-out, with the data on invites available from March 2000.
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8 Linkage with the SCR allowed CRC incidence to be calculated for the participant and
9 non-participant groups and linkage with the NRS deaths records allowed removal of
10 participants from study at the point of death. Follow-up data were available to 31
11 December 2017. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated for participant and non-
12 participant groups as described above.
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28 The age structure of the screening population changed a great deal in the early years of
29 the study period (see Supplementary Table 1). The ageing of the original pilot cohort, in
30 addition to the expansion of the age-range on national rollout, influence the annual CRC
31 incidence rate, despite adjustment through standardisation. In addition, any reduction
32 seen in annual CRC incidence could be influenced by a shortening time to diagnosis.
33
34 That is, since cancers are detected earlier, the years after roll-out see a reduction in
35 incidence exclusively due to early detection rather than to prevention of disease. To
36 better analyse these issues, time-to-event analysis was used in addition to the
37 descriptive time-series analysis. This facilitated better understanding of the relationship
38 between participation in screening and how it affects an individual's risk over time.
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40 Cumulative incidence was estimated using the Kaplan-Meier method. Cox regression
41 was also used to estimate the impact of screening participation on time from invite to
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3 CRC diagnosis, adjusting for age at first invite, sex, and level of socioeconomic status
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5 as determined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
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11 An underlying assumption of Cox regression is that of proportional hazards, i.e., that the
12
13 ratio of the hazards between treatment and non-treatment groups remains constant
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15 over time. This assumption was not met for the participation status variable, since the
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17 CRC hazard increases at biennial intervals for the participant group, consistent with
18
19 screening participation. In consequence, an alternative analytical approach is also
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21 presented, with separate hazard ratios reported for less than, and more than, seven
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23 years of follow-up. Seven years was chosen as the cut-off because participant
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25 cumulative incidence is consistently lower than non-participant (and the proportional
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27 hazards assumption is met) from this point. All analyses were performed using R
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29 statistical software, version 3.5.1.
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38 Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in
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40 development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of
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42 this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable.
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48 The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the
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50 collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the
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52 decision to submit the paper for publication.
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6 All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at
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8 r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk
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11 12 13 14 15 16 17 **Results** 18 19 20 21 22

23 77,262 CRC were diagnosed in Scotland between 1997 and 2017. From the
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25 introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 were invited to participate,
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27 of whom 1,487,999 participated at least once. There were 24,817 CRC diagnosed
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29 within the population invited to screen (15,663 in participants, 9,154 in non-participants)
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31 in the same period. These CRC were detected through both screening and non-
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33 screening pathways.
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41 In the 50-74 years (screening) age range, a slight drop in incidence was observed, from
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43 154.4 cases per 100,000 in 2000, the first year of the demonstration pilot, to 137.8 in
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45 2005. Then, coinciding with commencement of roll-out of screening across the country
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47 in 2007, an increase was noted, which peaked at 156.5 cases per 100,000 in 2010 and
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49 began to fall to levels well below those seen in the immediate pre-screening period,
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51 reaching 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017 (Figure 1). In those aged 75 years and over (post-
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53 screening), a consistent drop in incidence was noted from 2009 (217.7 per 100,000) to
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3 2017 (179.7 per 100,100) (Figure 2) whereas, in those aged under 50 years (pre-
4 screening) a rise throughout the study period from 5.3 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8
5 per 100,000 in 2017 was seen, albeit with fluctuations (Figure 3).
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14 When CRC incidence in the population who had been offered screening was examined,
15 there was a distinct difference between those who had participated at least once and
16 those who never participated. The data shown are age and sex-standardised since
17 these variables influence both CRC incidence and uptake of screening, with both uptake
18 and incidence increasing with age, and with uptake being lower, but incidence higher, in
19 men than in women.¹⁰ Figure 4 shows that incidence increased more in the participant
20 group than in the non-participant group as national roll-out of screening started but that,
21 after roll-out had been completed, incidence fell in the participant group to a greater
22 extent than in the non-participant group, with participant incidence 13.9% below non-
23 participant in 2017. Data obtained prior to 2005 was still influenced by the age structure
24 of the invited population despite adjustment.
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43 Analysis of cumulative incidence shown in Figure 5 demonstrates the risk of developing
44 CRC over time. Fluctuations can be seen initially in the participant group, consistent
45 with the biennial screening interval. The participant group then remains consistently
46 below that of the non-participant from around seven years of follow-up.
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3 Cox regression analysis adjusted for age, sex and socioeconomic deprivation gave a
4 hazard ratio of 0.92 for participants, relative to non-participants (95% CI: 0.90-0.95).

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7 The hazard ratios, when separating the follow-up period at seven years, were 0.95
8 (95% CI: 0.92-0.98) in the period up to seven years and 0.87 (95% CI: 0.83-0.91) in the
9 period seven years or more.
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18 Discussion

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24 **Statement of principal findings** - The findings in this study have similarities with those
25 reported in from other high-income countries,⁴ namely that the incidence of CRC is
26 falling in older age groups but increasing in people under the age of 50 years.
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29 However, in this study, we were not only able to examine the changes in CRC incidence
30 by age, but also by screening participation, and this demonstrated that the fall in
31 incidence was more evident in those who had participated in screening.
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42 **Strengths and weaknesses in relation to other studies** - The Minnesota randomised
43 controlled trial (RCT), which employed mostly rehydrated Hemoccult II giving a positivity
44 of 9.8 %, did demonstrate a modest reduction in the groups offered screening after 18
45 years of follow-up,¹¹ but the Nottingham RCT, which used gFOBT in un-rehydrated form
46 (the same approach that was adopted in Scotland) and reported a 2% positivity, showed
47 no effect on CRC incidence after 11 years.¹² Overall, previous studies of the effect of
48 gFOBT screening on CRC incidence have not shown a substantial effect. In Scotland,
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3 from December 2009, biennial gFOBT screening was being offered to the whole of the
4 eligible population. This resulted in a positivity of around 2%, so that, with an average
5 uptake at this time of 55%, only around 1% of people being offered screening actually
6 underwent colonoscopy.⁸ Of those that did, the average positive predictive value of
7 gFOBT for CRC was 10% and 40% for adenoma,⁸ so that less than 0.5% of the
8 population offered screening (the 50-74 year age range) would have had removal of
9 adenoma. However, in the present study, the groups were much bigger than in the RCT
10 and the reduction in incidence seen in the 50-74 years age range is likely to have been
11 due, at least in part, to polypectomy following a positive screening test result. The rise
12 in incidence immediately after roll-out and preceding the consistent fall is likely to have
13 been due to the well-described screening effect caused by a combination of early and
14 over-diagnosis.¹³ This would not explain the later fall in incidence, however, since the
15 incidence of disease after the introduction of screening tends not to fall back to baseline
16 because of over-diagnosis (i.e., some people with screen-detected disease would have
17 never presented clinically) as is the case in breast cancer screening.¹⁴

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41 **Meaning of the study** - In November 2017, the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme
42 changed the screening test from gFOBT to a quantitative faecal immunochemical test
43 (FIT) at a threshold of 80 µg haemoglobin/g faeces. At this threshold, in the first year of
44 screening with FIT, there was a 100% relative increase in the number of participants
45 with adenomas identified,¹⁴ so that, going forward, screening using FIT can be expected
46 to bring about a greater reduction in CRC incidence than has been seen to date. The
47 other very important consideration is the increase in CRC incidence seen in younger
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3 people. One approach to this could be to extend screening to those aged under 50
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5 years, but it must be borne in mind that, under the age of 50 years, although incidence
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7 is increasing,¹⁵ it is still much lower than in the current screening age range.
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13 **Unanswered questions and future research** - There is no objective evidence yet to
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15 support screening under the age of 50 years, and other approaches, including improved
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17 awareness of symptoms, increased use of FIT to triage patients presenting in primary
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19 care with symptoms¹⁶ and addressing lifestyle issues in the Scottish population must be
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21 part of the solution. We cannot necessarily screen our way out of this problem.
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25 Observational data such as these cannot prove that screening is the only cause of
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27 reduced incidence. Over the age of 50 years, individuals are much more likely to
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29 undergo colonoscopy because of lower bowel symptoms than those under 50 years,
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31 and this may explain at least part of the incidence reduction in those aged over 50
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33 years. It is interesting that, in the over 75 years age group, a consistent decline in
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35 incidence was seen from 2009 onwards. Some of this cohort will have had the
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37 opportunity to return screening tests, but by no means all, and it is likely that
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39 colonoscopy for the investigation of symptoms is performed even more frequently in this
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41 age range.
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50 The reasons underlying the marked increase in incidence in those aged under 50 years
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52 is not clear, but may relate to lifestyle factors, particularly around diet, body weight and
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54 physical activity, all of which are associated with increased risk of CRC.^{17,18} Rising rates
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3 of obesity in younger life (which are indicators of diet and physical activity) are of
4 particular interest because excess adiposity is now experienced by more people at
5 earlier life stages and a recent study has demonstrated a relationship between body
6 mass index in childhood and risk of adult CRC.¹⁹
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16 However, the clear separation of yearly and cumulative incidence by participation lends
17 persuasive evidence to the hypothesis that screening is at least in part responsible for
18 the observed incidence patterns in the population. It could still be argued that the
19 people who participated in screening were healthier than those who did not, and that
20 lifestyle factors were also responsible for this observation but, given the clear effect of
21 removal of adenomas on CRC incidence,⁶ it is highly likely that screening played an
22 important role.
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36 **Contributor statement**

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41 GRCC collected and analysed the data, participated in data interpretation, and
42 contributed to writing the paper. AAS contributed on dietary issues, participated in data
43 interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. TGG assisted with analysing and
44 validating the data, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the
45 paper. JAS directed the laboratories that analysed the faecal tests in the SBoSP from
46 2010, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. CGF
47 directed the SBoSP laboratories to 2010, participated in data interpretation, and
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3 provided significant input into the writing of the paper. RJCS is Clinical Director of the
4
5 SBoSP, initiated the study, led the data interpretation, and wrote first and final drafts of
6
7 the paper, and is guarantor. The corresponding author attests that all listed authors
8
9 meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.
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34 third party to do any or all of the above.
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Declaration of interests

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at
www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: no support from any organisation for the
submitted work; CGF did consultancy for Immunostics Inc, Ocean, NJ, USA, and does

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3 for Hitachi Chemical Diagnostic Systems Co., Ltd, Tokyo, Japan; no other relationships
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5 or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work have been done.
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16 We acknowledge the support of Scottish Government and the NHS National Services
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18 and Information Services Divisions.
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24 **Patient and public involvement statement**

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29
30 Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in
31
32 development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of
33
34 this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable.
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42
43
44
45
46 The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the
47
48 collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the
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50 decision to submit the paper for publication.
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Data sharing

All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

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10 **Legends to Figures**

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15 **Figure 1.** Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 50-74 years, from
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17 1997 to 2017
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22 **Figure 2.** Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 75 years and over,
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24 from 1997 to 2017
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29 **Figure 3.** Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages less than 50 years,
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31 from 1997 to 2017
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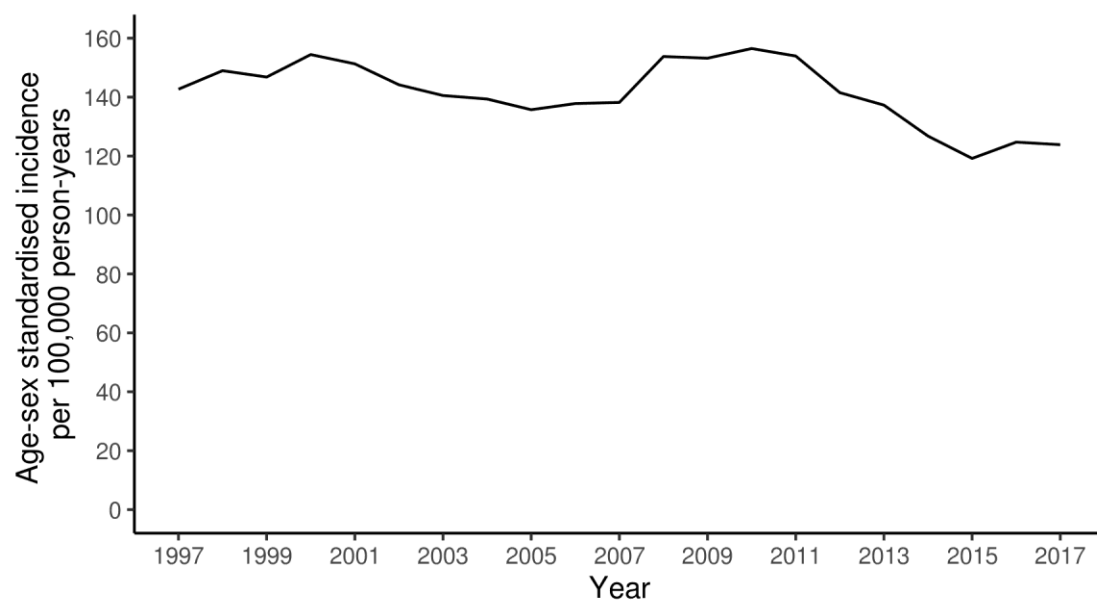
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36 **Figure 4.** Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence for the screening
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38 population, by screening participation status (95% confidence intervals shown)
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43 **Figure 5.** Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by screening participation status
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47 **Legend to Supplementary Table 1**

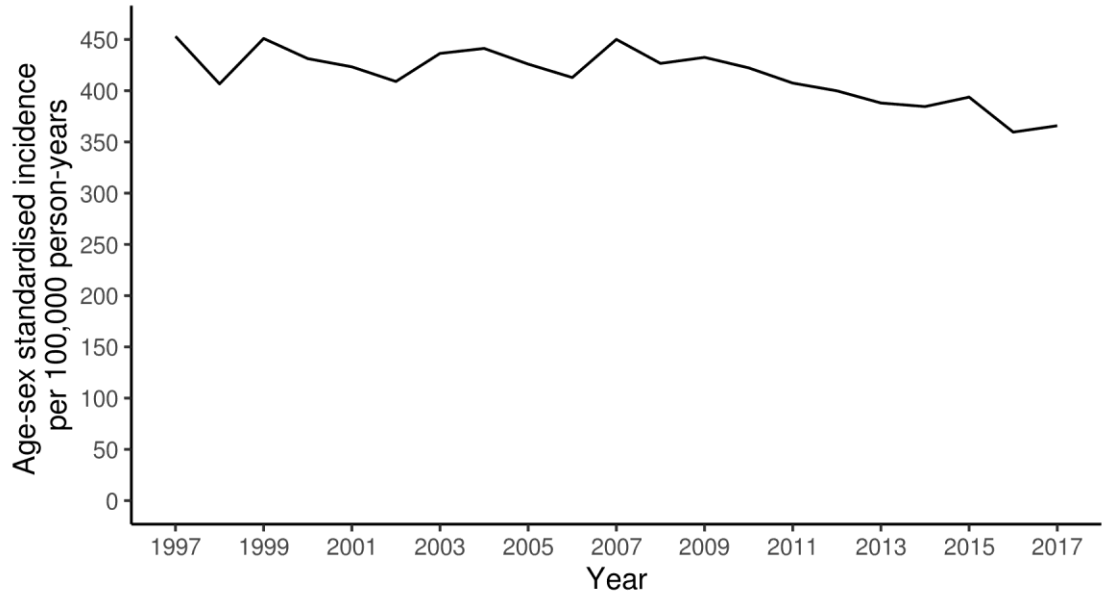
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52 Supplementary Table 1: Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by
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Figure 1. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017



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Figure 2. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 75 years and over, from 1997 to 2017



review only

Figure 3. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages less than 50 years, from 1997 to 2017

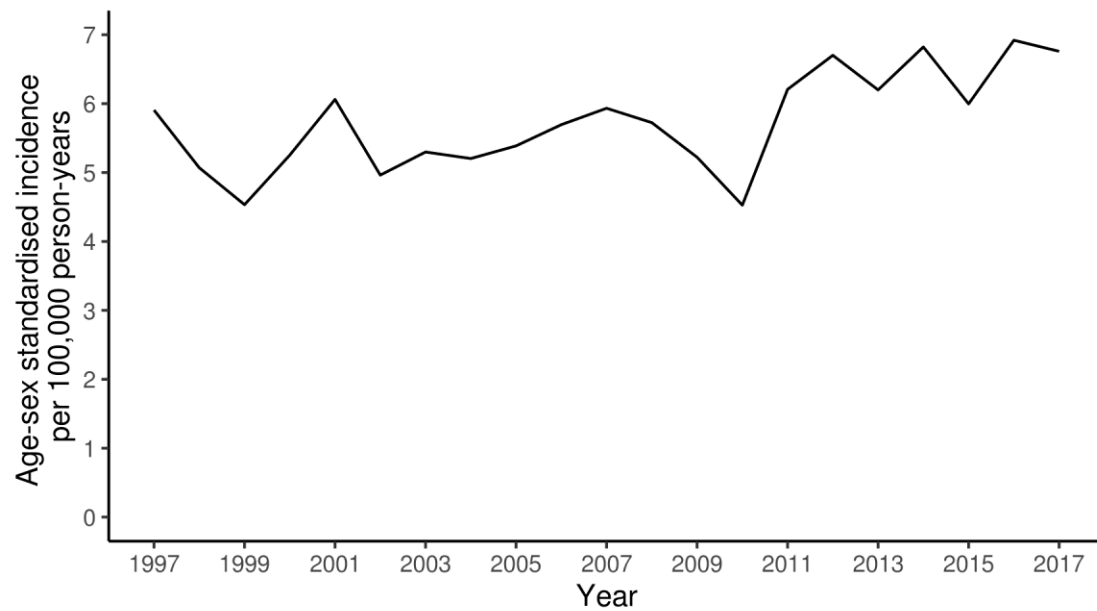
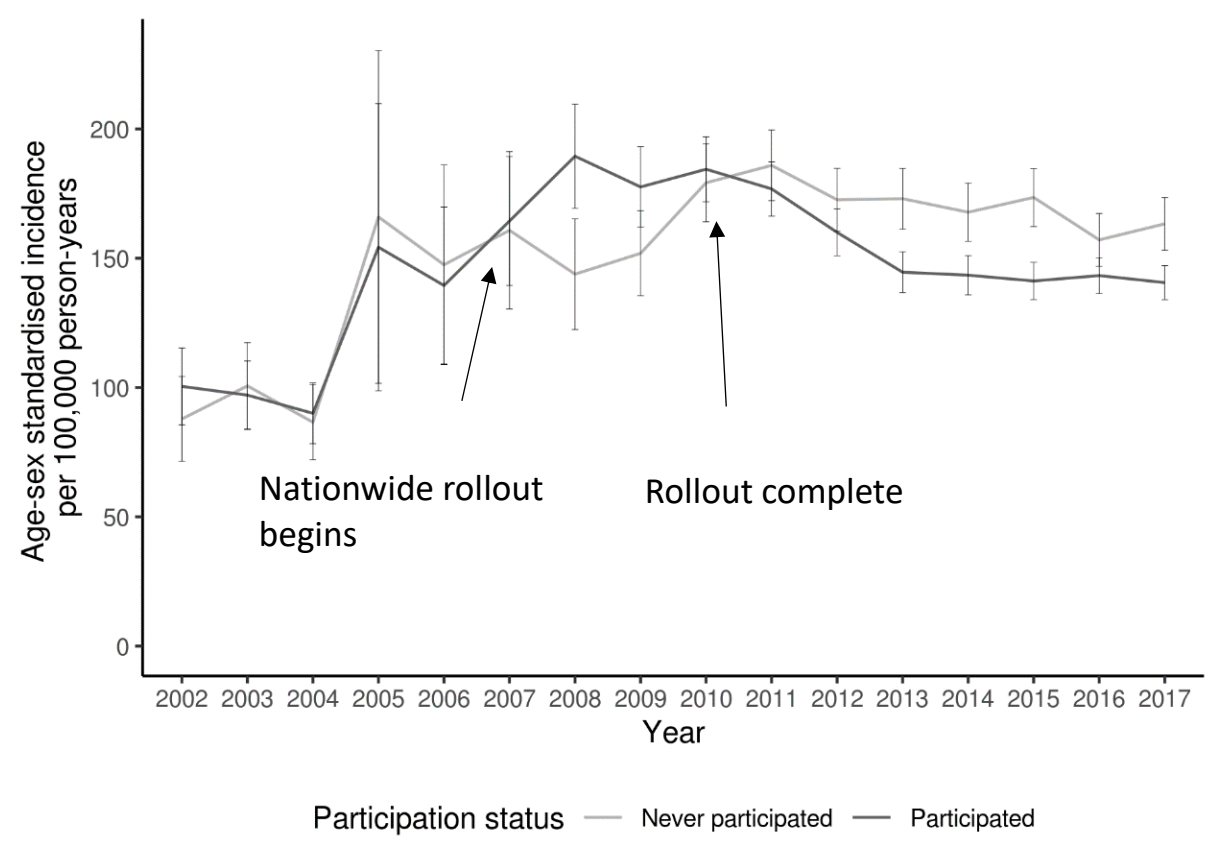
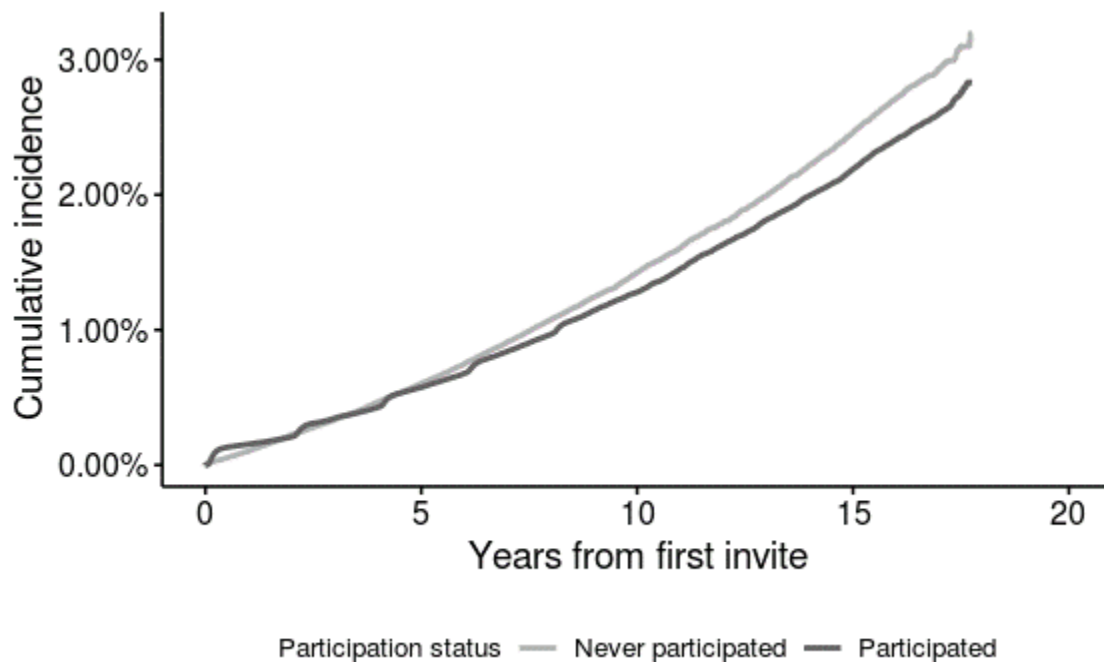


Figure 4. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence for the screening population, by screening participation status (95% confidence intervals shown)



only

Figure 5. Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by screening participation status



Supplementary Table 1: Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by year

Year	Age distribution of population, n (%),											
	50-54		55-59		60-64		65-69		70-74		75+	
2001	54,240	(26.4%)	51,239	(25.0%)	44,137	(21.5%)	42,905	(20.9%)	12,679	(6.2%)	-	(0.0%)
2002	61,490	(22.2%)	74,204	(26.8%)	60,079	(21.7%)	57,307	(20.7%)	23,851	(8.6%)	-	(0.0%)
2003	65,241	(21.5%)	81,141	(26.7%)	63,410	(20.9%)	59,472	(19.6%)	34,581	(11.4%)	-	(0.0%)
2004	67,571	(20.5%)	87,062	(26.4%)	68,088	(20.6%)	61,739	(18.7%)	45,561	(13.8%)	-	(0.0%)
2005	62,874	(18.2%)	92,267	(26.7%)	70,813	(20.5%)	62,646	(18.2%)	52,651	(15.3%)	3,829	(1.1%)
2006	76,947	(20.2%)	93,881	(24.6%)	78,362	(20.6%)	64,371	(16.9%)	56,093	(14.7%)	11,204	(2.9%)
2007	82,678	(19.7%)	96,401	(23.0%)	88,775	(21.2%)	70,209	(16.7%)	59,571	(14.2%)	21,890	(5.2%)
2008	124,768	(20.9%)	130,326	(21.8%)	120,431	(20.1%)	100,736	(16.8%)	81,370	(13.6%)	40,230	(6.7%)
2009	207,433	(21.4%)	203,613	(21.0%)	192,470	(19.8%)	164,107	(16.9%)	132,759	(13.7%)	70,838	(7.3%)
2010	298,073	(21.6%)	279,971	(20.3%)	279,627	(20.2%)	225,020	(16.3%)	189,222	(13.7%)	109,061	(7.9%)
2011	339,145	(21.0%)	321,494	(20.0%)	317,497	(19.7%)	267,034	(16.6%)	218,456	(13.6%)	147,739	(9.2%)
2012		(20.8%)		(19.8%)		(18.4%)		(17.1%)		(13.1%)		(10.7%)

	357,830		339,212		316,700		293,561		225,389		184,587	
2013	376,959	(20.7%)	357,825	(19.6%)	323,931	(17.8%)	310,399	(17.0%)	233,617	(12.8%)	221,685	(12.2%)
2014	398,197	(20.6%)	375,480	(19.5%)	332,956	(17.3%)	323,005	(16.7%)	244,065	(12.6%)	256,410	(13.3%)
2015	411,856	(20.3%)	393,919	(19.5%)	342,353	(16.9%)	337,714	(16.7%)	249,651	(12.3%)	289,123	(14.3%)
2016	425,191	(20.1%)	408,845	(19.3%)	354,588	(16.8%)	338,041	(16.0%)	267,472	(12.7%)	320,149	(15.1%)
2017	422,301	(19.3%)	423,926	(19.4%)	367,652	(16.8%)	331,431	(15.2%)	290,065	(13.3%)	352,178	(16.1%)

STROBE Statement—checklist of items that should be included in reports of observational studies

	Item No	Recommendation	Page No
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	4-5
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	7-8
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	8
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	7-8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	9-11
Participants	6	(a) <i>Cohort study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up <i>Case-control study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of case ascertainment and control selection. Give the rationale for the choice of cases and controls <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants	9-10
		(b) <i>Cohort study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed <i>Case-control study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and the number of controls per case	N/A
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-10
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9-10
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	10-11
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	9
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	9-10
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	10-11
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	9-10
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	N/A
		(d) <i>Cohort study</i> —If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed <i>Case-control study</i> —If applicable, explain how matching of cases and controls was addressed <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of sampling strategy	N/A
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	N/A

Continued on next page

Results			
Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	12
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	N/A
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	N/A
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	12-13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	N/A
		(c) <i>Cohort study</i> —Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	12-14
Outcome data	15*	<i>Cohort study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	12-14
		<i>Case-control study</i> —Report numbers in each exposure category, or summary measures of exposure	N/A
		<i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures	N/A
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	12-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	N/A
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	N/A
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	12-14
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations	19	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias	14-15
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	15-16
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	16-17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	19

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

BMJ Open

Variation in changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and association with screening uptake; an observational study.

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID	bmjopen-2020-037925.R1
Article Type:	Original research
Date Submitted by the Author:	13-May-2020
Complete List of Authors:	Clark, Gavin; NHS Scotland National Services Division Anderson, Annie; university of dundee, Centre for public health nutrition research Godfrey, Thomas; NHS Scotland National Services Division Strachan, Judith; NHS Tayside, Blood Sciences Fraser, Callum; University of Dundee, Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening Steele, Robert; University of Dundee, Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening
Primary Subject Heading:	Gastroenterology and hepatology
Secondary Subject Heading:	Oncology, Public health
Keywords:	GASTROENTEROLOGY, ONCOLOGY, PUBLIC HEALTH

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3 **Variation in changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and**
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10
11 Gavin RC Clark, Annie S Anderson (0000-0002-0047-4500), Thomas G Godfrey, Judith
12
13 A Strachan, Callum G Fraser (0000-0002-1333-7994), Robert JC Steele (0000-0003-
14
15 4248-6785)

16
17
18
19
20 Information Services Division, NHS National Services Scotland, Edinburgh EH12 9EB,
21
22 Scotland, UK

23
24
25 Gavin RC Clark senior information analyst

26
27 Thomas G Godfrey information analyst

28
29 Centre for Public Health Nutrition, University of Dundee, Ninewells Hospital and Medical
30
31 School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

32
33
34 Annie S Anderson professor

35
36 Department of Blood Sciences and Scottish Bowel Screening Laboratory, Ninewells
37
38 Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

39
40
41 Judith A Strachan consultant clinical scientist

42
43 Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening, University of Dundee,
44
45 Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

46
47
48 Callum G Fraser, honorary professor,

49
50 Robert JC Steele, senior research professor
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Emails:

Gavin RC Clark, gavin.clark2@nhs.net

Annie S Anderson, a.s.anderson@dundee.ac.uk

Thomas G Godfrey, thomas.godfrey@nhs.net

Judith A Strachan, judith.strachan@nhs.net

Callum G Fraser, callum.fraser@nhs.net

Robert JC Steele, r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

Corresponding author: Professor Robert JC Steele, Mailbox 4, Level 7, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK.

Email: r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

Telephone: + 44 (0)1382 3835444

Short title: Incidence of colorectal cancer

No of words (abstract): 296

No of words (text): 2938

No of references: 21

No of Tables: 0

No of Figures: 5

No of Supplementary Tables: 2

No of Supplementary Figures: 3

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5 **Keywords:** adenoma, colorectal cancer, faecal occult blood test, incidence, mortality,
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7 screening
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11 **Abbreviations:** CRC: colorectal cancer, FIT: faecal immunochemical test for
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13 haemoglobin, gFOBT: guaiac faecal occult blood testing, HDI: human development
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15 index, NRS: National Records Scotland, RCT: randomised controlled trial, SBSDB:
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17 Scottish Bowel Screening Database, SCR: Scottish Cancer Registry, SEER:
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19 Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results, UK: United Kingdom, USA: United States
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Abstract

Objectives - In developed countries, the incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) has declined in the over 50 years age group but increased in younger people. We studied CRC incidence by age and the influence of screening uptake.

Design - Age and sex-standardised incidence for CRC from 1997 to 2017 were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry (SCR). In addition, linkage between the Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD) and the SCR allowed investigation of any association between screening participation and CRC incidence.

Setting – Scotland and the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme, in which guaiac faecal occult blood test screening was piloted from March 2000 and fully rolled by December 2009.

Participants – From the introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 were invited to participate, of whom 1,487,999 participated at least once.

Main outcome measures – Incidence of CRC.

Results - In the screening age range (50-74 years), CRC incidence peaked at 156.5 cases per 100,000 in 2010 after full roll-out of screening across Scotland but fell to 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017. However, under 50 years, there was a rise of from 5.3

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3 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8 per 100,000 in 2017. When CRC incidence was
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5 examined in those who had been offered screening, incidence fell in the participant
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7 group more than in the non-participant group after roll-out of screening was complete.
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10 Analysis of cumulative incidence demonstrated that CRC incidence in the participant
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12 group remained consistently below that of the non-participant from around seven years
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14 of follow-up.
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19 **Conclusions** - The incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) in Scotland has declined in
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21 the over 50 years age groups but increased in younger people. It is likely that population
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23 screening has contributed to the reduction in CRC incidence in the over 50 years age
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25 group.
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- We examine age and sex-standardised incidence data for colorectal cancer for the years 1997 to 2017 obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry and linkage between the Registry and the Scottish Bowel Screening Database.
- We are able to show previously unreported changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer in Scotland in all age groups.
- We are able to examine in detail, for the first time, if population-based screening using faecal occult blood tests is associated with incidence of colorectal cancer.
- Associations between incidence and plausible reasons for the changes over time will help the development of future interventions.
- Although this was a large study, we did not examine incidence by yearly age, only in three large groups.

Introduction

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is a major health problem worldwide. In Scotland, it is currently the third most commonly diagnosed non-cutaneous cancer and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths.¹ However, the incidence of CRC varies widely across the world and it is estimated that 60% of CRC deaths occur in those countries with a high or very high human development index (HDI).² Western lifestyle factors, including obesity, lack of physical exercise, a diet rich in red and processed meat, smoking, and alcohol, have all been linked to the risk of developing CRC,³ and marked increases in both incidence and mortality have been observed in many medium-high HDI countries, especially in Asia, South America and Eastern Europe.² However, both incidence and mortality have either stabilised or declined in countries with the highest HDI, e.g., Australia, New Zealand, United States of America (USA), and several Western European countries.⁴ These reductions in mortality are likely to be attributable to improved access to high quality treatment and earlier diagnosis through both screening and through prompt investigation of those presenting with symptoms.

The declines in incidence are not so easy to explain, especially since the frequency of obesity continues to rise in all high HDI countries.⁵ However, there is now good evidence, largely from the USA and particularly from the Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) database that, while incidence has been falling since around 1985 in those aged 50 years and over, it has been rising in those under 50 years since the mid-1990s.³ In a recent analysis of incidence and mortality databases from 39

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3 countries, it was confirmed that countries with the highest HDI had a decrease in CRC
4 incidence, but that incidence of colon and rectal cancers has continued to increase in
5 countries with medium–high HDI, and in younger populations.⁶ It has been postulated
6 that screening may be responsible for the reduction in incidence in the group aged over
7 50 years, especially where this is associated with high rates of large bowel endoscopy,
8 which facilitates the diagnosis and removal of pre-malignant adenomas.³ Since there is
9 now robust evidence from randomised trials of endoscopic screening that removal of
10 adenoma leads to a reduction in CRC incidence,⁷ this is an attractive hypothesis, but
11 one that is difficult to test.
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26 In Scotland, CRC screening, initially using biennial guaiac faecal occult blood tests
27 (gFOBT), was rolled out to the whole of the population aged 50-74 years in 2007 after a
28 three screening rounds pilot which started in 2000.^{8,9} In addition, Scotland, along with
29 the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), is ranked as having a very high HDI,² and
30 although the incidence has fallen by 18.6% from 2007 to 2017,¹ it still has a high
31 incidence of CRC,¹ and lifestyle factors associated with CRC are prevalent in the
32 population.¹⁰ We therefore examined the incidence of CRC between 1997 and 2017 in
33 the 50-74 years screening age range, the post-screening age range, and the pre-
34 screening age range. In addition, the effect of screening participation on CRC incidence
35 was assessed.
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Methods

In Scotland, screening for CRC using biennial gFOBT, offered to everyone in the 50-69 years age range and registered with a general practitioner, commenced in March 2000 with a pilot involving three of the fourteen NHS Boards responsible for routine health care. Roll-out to the rest of Scotland began in July 2007 and was completed by December 2009. The age range was also extended up to age 74 years for the whole of Scotland during roll-out. Details of the pilot, roll-out and descriptions of the screening algorithms have been published previously.^{8,9} Data are collected centrally by the Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland and held in the Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD).

To assess changes in the incidence of CRC in different age ranges around the time of the introduction of screening, data were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry (SCR) for the years 1997 to 2017. Crude incidence rates were calculated by sex and five-year age group using mid-year population estimates from the National Records of Scotland (NRS). These rates were then directly standardised using the 2013 European Standard Population. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated separately for the screening (50-74 years), post-screening (75 years and higher), and pre-screening (under 50 years) age ranges. Age-sex standardised CRC mortality rates were also calculated for the screening (50-74 years) and pre-screening (under 50 years) age ranges using death registration data from NRS.

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5 To investigate the impact of screening participation on incidence, linkage was carried
6 out between the SBSDB, the SCR and NRS deaths. The SBSDB allowed identification of
7 those invited for screening and those who participated. Participants who received a
8 positive or negative screening test result at any point were included in the participant
9 cohort. Those who did not receive a positive or negative test result, or never returned a
10 completed test, were included in the non-participant cohort. Data were included from the
11 pilot through to national roll-out, with the data on invites available from March 2000.
12 Linkage with the SCR allowed CRC incidence to be calculated for the participant and
13 non-participant groups and linkage with the NRS deaths records allowed removal of
14 participants from study at the point of death. Follow-up data were available to 31
15 December 2017. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated for participant and non-
16 participant groups as described above.
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35 The age structure of the screening population changed a great deal in the early years of
36 the study period (see Supplementary Table 1). The ageing of the original pilot cohort, in
37 addition to the expansion of the age-range on national rollout, influence the annual CRC
38 incidence rate, despite adjustment through standardisation. In addition, any reduction
39 seen in annual CRC incidence could be influenced by a shortening time to diagnosis.
40 That is, since cancers are detected earlier, the years after roll-out see a reduction in
41 incidence exclusively due to early detection rather than to prevention of disease. To
42 better analyse these issues, time-to-event analysis was used in addition to the
43 descriptive time-series analysis. This facilitated better understanding of the relationship
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3 between participation in screening and how it affects an individual's risk over time.

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5 Cumulative incidence was estimated using the Kaplan-Meier method. Cox regression
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7 was also used to estimate the impact of screening participation on time from invite to
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9 CRC diagnosis, adjusting for age at first invite, sex, and level of socioeconomic status
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11 as determined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
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17 An underlying assumption of Cox regression is that of proportional hazards, i.e., that the
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19 ratio of the hazards between treatment and non-treatment groups remains constant
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21 over time. This assumption was not met for the participation status variable, since the
22
23 CRC hazard increases at biennial intervals for the participant group, consistent with
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25 screening participation. In consequence, an alternative analytical approach is also
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27 presented, with separate hazard ratios reported for less than, and more than, seven
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29 years of follow-up. Seven years was chosen as the cut-off because participant
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31 cumulative incidence is consistently lower than non-participant (and the proportional
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33 hazards assumption is met) from this point. All analyses were performed using R
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35 statistical software, version 3.5.1 and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are shown as bars
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37 in the Figures, when relevant.
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45 Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in
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47 development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of
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49 this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable. Formal
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51 ethical approval for the study was not required because individual participants were not
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53 approached and only routinely collected population-based data were used.
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5 The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the
6 collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the
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8 decision to submit the paper for publication.
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14 All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at
15 r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk
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21 **Results**

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26 77,262 CRC were diagnosed in Scotland between 1997 and 2017. From the
27 introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 individuals were invited to
28 participate (409,255 in the Pilot, 1,985,917 in the Programme), of whom 1,487,999
29 participated at least once. There were 24,817 CRC diagnosed within the population
30 invited to screen (15,663 in participants, 9,154 in non-participants) in the same period.
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32 These CRC were detected through both screening and non-screening pathways.
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42 In the 50-74 years (screening) age range, a slight drop in incidence was observed, from
43 154.4 cases per 100,000 in 2000, the first year of the demonstration pilot, to 137.8 in
44 2006. Then, coinciding with commencement of roll-out of screening across the country
45 in 2007, an increase was noted, which peaked at 156.5 cases per 100,000 in 2010 and
46 began to fall to levels well below those seen in the immediate pre-screening period,
47 reaching 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017 (Figure 1). In those aged 75 years and over (post-
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3 screening), a consistent drop in incidence was noted from 2009 (432.5 per 100,000) to
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5 2017 (366.8 per 100,000) (Figure 2) whereas, in those aged under 50 years (pre-
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7 screening) a rise throughout the study period from 5.3 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8
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9 per 100,000 in 2017 was seen, albeit with fluctuations (Figure 3).

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15 When CRC incidence in the population who had been offered screening was examined,
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17 there was a distinct difference between those who had participated at least once and
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19 those who never participated. The data shown are age and sex-standardised since
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21 these variables influence both CRC incidence and uptake of screening, with both uptake
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23 and incidence increasing with age, and with uptake being lower, but incidence higher, in
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25 men than in women.¹¹ Figure 4 shows that incidence increased more in the participant
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27 group than in the non-participant group as national roll-out of screening started but that,
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29 after roll-out had been completed, incidence fell in the participant group to a greater
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31 extent than in the non-participant group, with participant incidence 13.9% below non-
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33 participant in 2017. The large increase in incidence in 2005 was due to there being no
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35 invitees in the over 75 years age range prior to this point (see Supplementary Table 2).
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37 Since the CRC risk in the over 75 years age range is higher than in those aged below
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39 75 years, the age-standardised rates are influenced by this ageing of the invited
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41 population.
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50 Analysis of cumulative incidence shown in Figure 5 demonstrates the risk of developing
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52 CRC over time. Fluctuations can be seen initially in the participant group, consistent
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54 with the biennial screening interval. The participant group then remains consistently
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3 below that of the non-participant group from around seven years of follow-up. Cox
4 regression analysis adjusted for age at first invite, sex and socioeconomic deprivation
5 gave a hazard ratio of 0.92 for participants, relative to non-participants (95% CI: 0.90-
6 0.95, $p < 0.001$). The hazard ratios, when separating the follow-up period at seven
7 years, were 0.95 (95% CI: 0.92-0.98, $p < 0.001$) in the period up to seven years and
8 0.87 (95% CI: 0.83-0.91, $p < 0.001$) in the period seven years or more. These data are
9 shown separately for males and females in Supplementary Figure 1.
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21 We also examined mortality in the 50-74 years (screening) and the under 50 years (pre-
22 screening) age groups. These data, with 95%CI, are given as Supplementary Figures 2
23 and 3, and show a substantial reduction in mortality since the introduction of screening
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33 Discussion

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37 **Statement of principal findings** - The findings in this study have similarities with those
38 reported in from other high-income countries,^{4,6} namely that the incidence of CRC is
39 falling in older age groups but increasing in people under the age of 50 years.
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42 However, in this study, we were not only able to examine the changes in CRC incidence
43 by age, but also by screening participation, and this demonstrated, for the first time to
44 our knowledge, that the fall in incidence was more evident in those who had participated
45 in screening.
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3 **Strengths and weaknesses in relation to other studies** - The Minnesota randomised
4 controlled trial (RCT), which employed mostly rehydrated Hemoccult II giving a positivity
5 of 9.8 %, did demonstrate a modest reduction in the groups offered screening after 18
6 years of follow-up,¹² but the Nottingham RCT, which used gFOBT in un-rehydrated form
7 (the same approach that was adopted in Scotland) and reported a 2% positivity, showed
8 no effect on CRC incidence after 11 years.¹³ Overall, previous studies of the effect of
9 gFOBT screening on CRC incidence have not shown a substantial effect. In Scotland,
10 from December 2009, biennial gFOBT screening was being offered to the whole of the
11 eligible population. This resulted in a positivity of around 2%, so that, with an average
12 uptake at this time of 55%, only around 1% of people being offered screening actually
13 underwent colonoscopy.⁹ Of those that did, the average positive predictive value of
14 gFOBT for CRC was 10% and 40% for adenoma,⁹ so that less than 0.5% of the
15 population offered screening (the 50-74 year age range) would have had removal of
16 adenoma. However, in the present study, the groups were much bigger than in the RCT
17 and the reduction in incidence seen in the 50-74 years age range is likely to have been
18 due, at least in part, to polypectomy following a positive screening test result. The rise
19 in incidence immediately after roll-out and preceding the consistent fall is likely to have
20 been due to the well-described screening effect caused by a combination of early and
21 over-diagnosis.¹⁴ This would not explain the later fall in incidence, however, since the
22 incidence of disease after the introduction of screening tends not to fall back to baseline
23 because of over-diagnosis (i.e., some people with screen-detected disease would have
24 never presented clinically) as is the case in breast cancer screening.¹⁵
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3 It could be argued that a fall in incidence would not necessarily translate into a fall in
4 mortality, if only indolent cancers were being prevented. However, this is highly
5 unlikely, given that the fall in incidence seen in the flexible sigmoidoscopy screening
6 trials was accompanied by reductions in mortality.⁷ In addition, just as North America,
7
8 Oceania and most European countries,⁶ CRC mortality in the 50-74 years age range in
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10 Scotland has fallen over time and it is likely that part of this effect can be attributed to
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12 early detection and prevention of disease as a result of screening.¹⁶ It is also interesting
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14 that we did not observe a fall in CRC mortality in the under 50 years age range, lending
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16 further strength to the argument that screening has contributed to this trend.
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26 **Meaning of the study** - In November 2017, the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme
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28 changed the screening test from gFOBT to a quantitative faecal immunochemical test
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30 (FIT) at a threshold of 80 µg haemoglobin/g faeces. At this threshold, in the first year of
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32 screening with FIT, there was a 100% relative increase in the number of participants
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34 with adenomas identified,¹⁷ so that, going forward, screening using FIT can be expected
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36 to bring about a greater reduction in CRC incidence than has been seen to date and this
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38 will be examined when the data become available. The other very important
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40 consideration is the increase in CRC incidence seen in younger people. One approach
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42 to this could be to extend screening to those aged under 50 years, but it must be borne
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44 in mind that, under the age of 50 years, although incidence is increasing,¹⁸ it is still
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46 much lower than in the current screening age range.
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3 **Unanswered questions and future research** - There is no objective evidence yet to
4 support screening under the age of 50 years, and other approaches, including improved
5 awareness of symptoms, increased use of FIT to triage patients presenting in primary
6 care with symptoms¹⁹ and addressing lifestyle issues in the Scottish population must be
7 part of the solution. The reasons underlying the marked increase in incidence in those
8 aged under 50 years are not clear, but may relate to lifestyle factors, particularly around
9 diet, body weight and physical activity, all of which are associated with increased risk of
10 CRC.²⁰ Rising rates of obesity in younger life (which are indicators of diet and physical
11 activity) are of particular interest, because excess adiposity is now experienced by more
12 people at earlier life stages and a recent study has demonstrated a relationship
13 between body mass index in childhood and risk of adult CRC.²¹ We cannot necessarily
14 screen our way out of this problem
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33 Observational data such as these cannot prove definitively that screening is the only
34 cause of reduced incidence. Over the age of 50 years, individuals are much more likely
35 to undergo colonoscopy because of lower bowel symptoms than those under 50 years,
36 and this may explain at least part of the incidence reduction in those aged over 50
37 years. It is interesting that, in the over 75 years age range, a consistent decline in
38 incidence was seen from 2009 onwards. Some of this cohort will have had the
39 opportunity to return screening tests, but by no means all, and it is likely that
40 colonoscopy for the investigation of symptoms is performed even more frequently in this
41 age range.
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3 However, the clear separation of yearly and cumulative incidence by participation in
4 screening lends persuasive evidence to the hypothesis that screening is at least in part
5 responsible for the observed incidence patterns in the population. It could still be
6 argued that the people who participated in screening were healthier than those who did
7 not, and that lifestyle factors were also responsible for this observation but, given the
8 clear effect of removal of adenomas on CRC incidence,⁷ it is highly likely that screening
9 played an important role.
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21 **Contributor statement**

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26 GRCC collected and analysed the data, participated in data interpretation, and
27 contributed to writing the paper. AAS contributed on dietary issues, participated in data
28 interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. TGG assisted with analysing and
29 validating the data, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the
30 paper. JAS directed the laboratories that analysed the faecal tests in the SBoSP from
31 2010, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. CGF
32 directed the SBoSP laboratories to 2010, participated in data interpretation, and
33 provided significant input into the writing of the paper. RJCS is Clinical Director of the
34 SBoSP, initiated the study, led the data interpretation, and wrote first and final drafts of
35 the paper, and is guarantor. The corresponding author attests that all listed authors
36 meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.
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28 **Declaration of interests**

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33 All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at
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35 www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: CGF did consultancy for Immunostics
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37 Inc, Ocean, NJ, USA, and does for Hitachi Chemical Diagnostic Systems Co., Ltd,
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39 Tokyo, Japan; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced
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41 the submitted work have been done.
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51 and Information Services Divisions.
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Patient and public involvement statement

Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable.

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The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the paper for publication.

Data sharing

All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

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Legends to Figures

Figure 1. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 2. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 75 years and over, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 3. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages less than 50 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 4. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence for the screening population per 100,000 person-years, by screening participation status (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 5. Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by screening participation status

Legends to Supplementary Tables and Figures

Supplementary Table 1

Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by year, in six age groups (years)

Supplementary Table 2.

Age distribution of colorectal cancers, by year, in six age groups (years)

Supplementary figure 1.

Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by sex and screening participation status

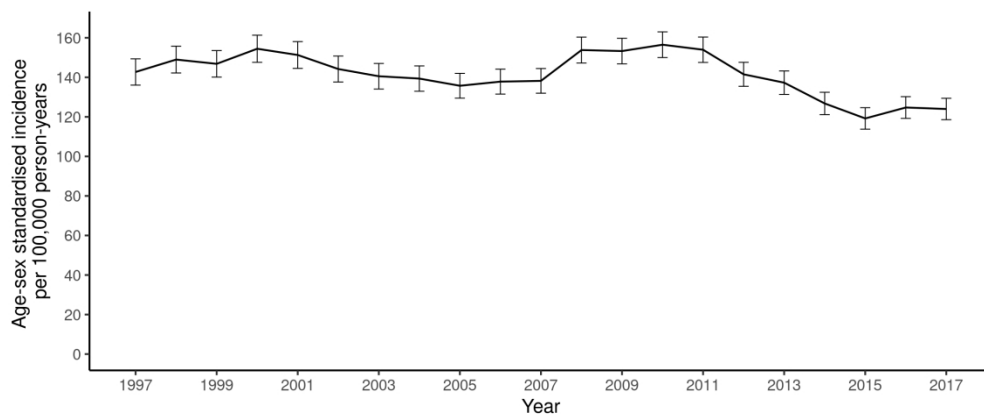
Supplementary Figure 2.

Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).

Supplementary Figure 3.

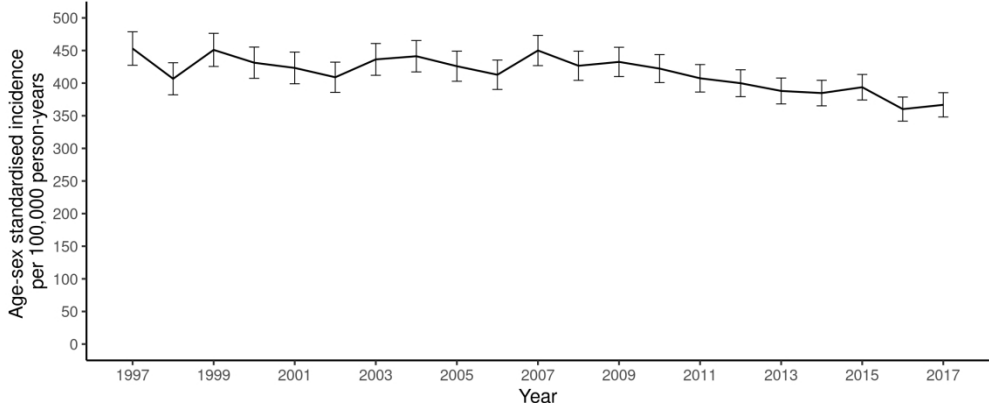
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3 Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages under 50 years, from 1997 to
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5 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).
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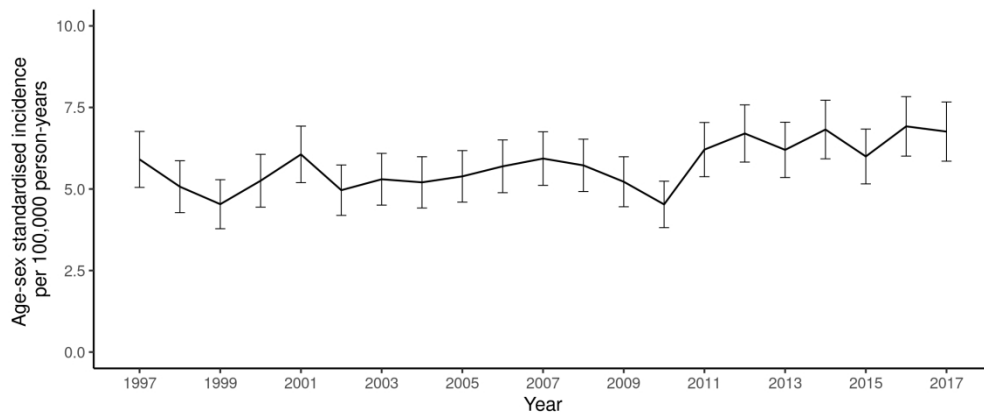


Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 (95% confidence intervals shown)

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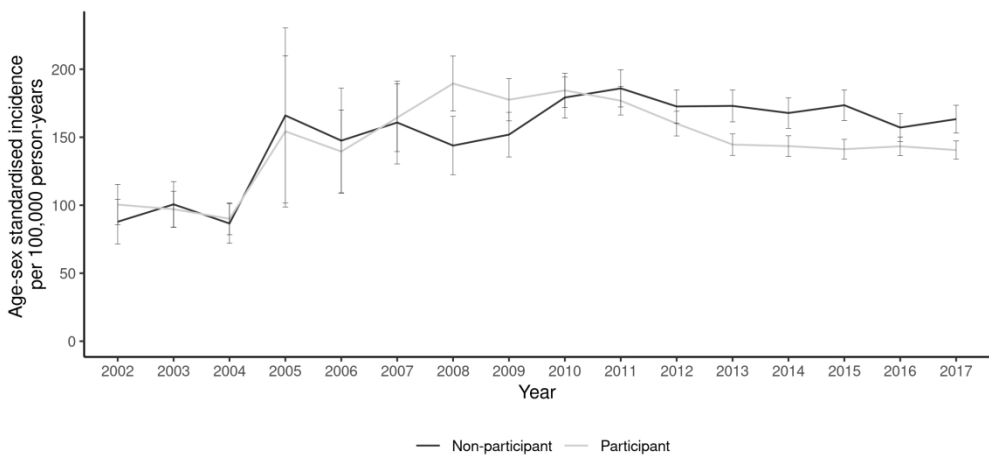


Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 75 years and over, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

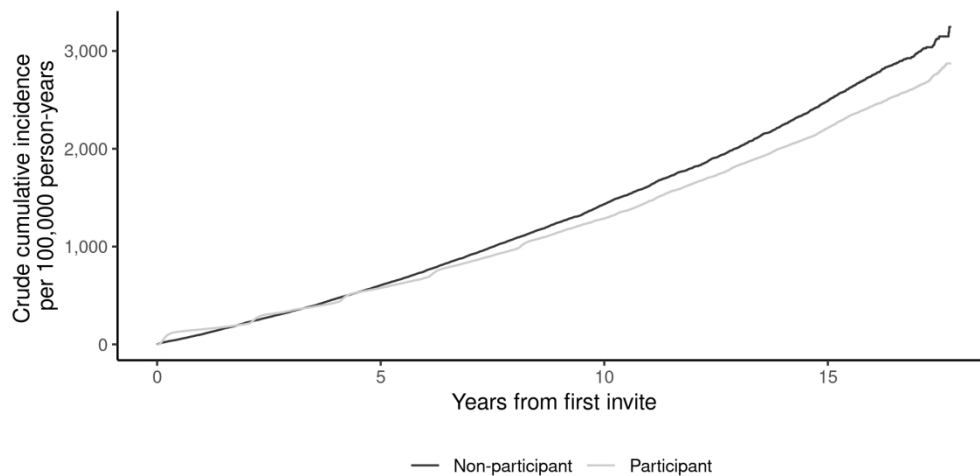


Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages less than 50 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

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Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence for the screening population per 100,000 person-years, by screening participation status (95% confidence intervals shown)



Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by screening participation status

Supplementary Table 1: Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by year, in six age groups (years)

Age distribution of population, n (%),

Year	50-54		55-59		60-64		65-69		70-74		75+	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
2001	54,240	(26.4%)	51,239	(25.0%)	44,137	(21.5%)	42,905	(20.9%)	12,679	(6.2%)	-	(0.0%)
2002	61,490	(22.2%)	74,204	(26.8%)	60,079	(21.7%)	57,307	(20.7%)	23,851	(8.6%)	-	(0.0%)
2003	65,241	(21.5%)	81,141	(26.7%)	63,410	(20.9%)	59,472	(19.6%)	34,581	(11.4%)	-	(0.0%)
2004	67,571	(20.5%)	87,062	(26.4%)	68,088	(20.6%)	61,739	(18.7%)	45,561	(13.8%)	-	(0.0%)
2005	62,874	(18.2%)	92,267	(26.7%)	70,813	(20.5%)	62,646	(18.2%)	52,651	(15.3%)	3,829	(1.1%)
2006	76,947	(20.2%)	93,881	(24.6%)	78,362	(20.6%)	64,371	(16.9%)	56,093	(14.7%)	11,204	(2.9%)
2007	82,678	(19.7%)	96,401	(23.0%)	88,775	(21.2%)	70,209	(16.7%)	59,571	(14.2%)	21,890	(5.2%)
2008	124,768	(20.9%)	130,326	(21.8%)	120,431	(20.1%)	100,736	(16.8%)	81,370	(13.6%)	40,230	(6.7%)
2009	207,433	(21.4%)	203,613	(21.0%)	192,470	(19.8%)	164,107	(16.9%)	132,759	(13.7%)	70,838	(7.3%)
2010	298,073	(21.6%)	279,971	(20.3%)	279,627	(20.2%)	225,020	(16.3%)	189,222	(13.7%)	109,061	(7.9%)
2011		(21.0%)		(20.0%)		(19.7%)		(16.6%)		(13.6%)		(9.2%)

	339,145		321,494		317,497		267,034		218,456		147,739	
2012	357,830	(20.8%)	339,212	(19.8%)	316,700	(18.4%)	293,561	(17.1%)	225,389	(13.1%)	184,587	(10.7%)
2013	376,959	(20.7%)	357,825	(19.6%)	323,931	(17.8%)	310,399	(17.0%)	233,617	(12.8%)	221,685	(12.2%)
2014	398,197	(20.6%)	375,480	(19.5%)	332,956	(17.3%)	323,005	(16.7%)	244,065	(12.6%)	256,410	(13.3%)
2015	411,856	(20.3%)	393,919	(19.5%)	342,353	(16.9%)	337,714	(16.7%)	249,651	(12.3%)	289,123	(14.3%)
2016	425,191	(20.1%)	408,845	(19.3%)	354,588	(16.8%)	338,041	(16.0%)	267,472	(12.7%)	320,149	(15.1%)
2017	422,301	(19.3%)	423,926	(19.4%)	367,652	(16.8%)	331,431	(15.2%)	290,065	(13.3%)	352,178	(16.1%)

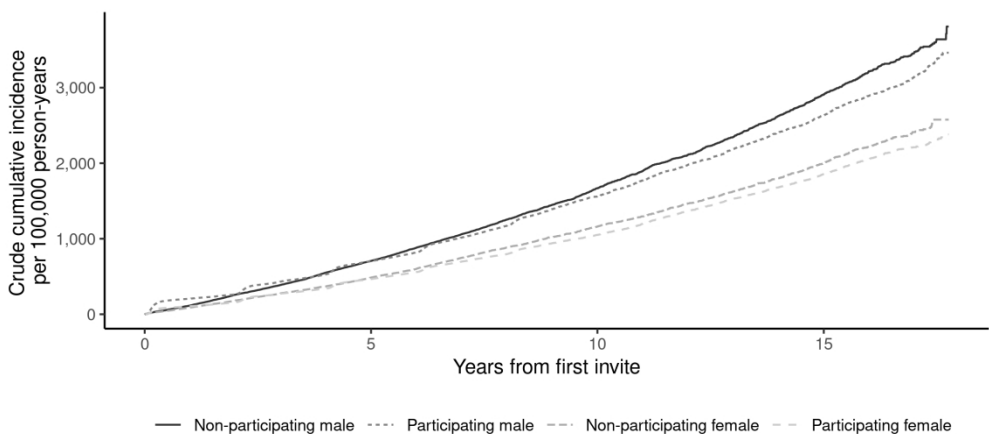
Supplementary Table 2: Age distribution of colorectal cancers, by year, in six age groups (years)

Age distribution of colorectal cancers detected in screening population, n (%)

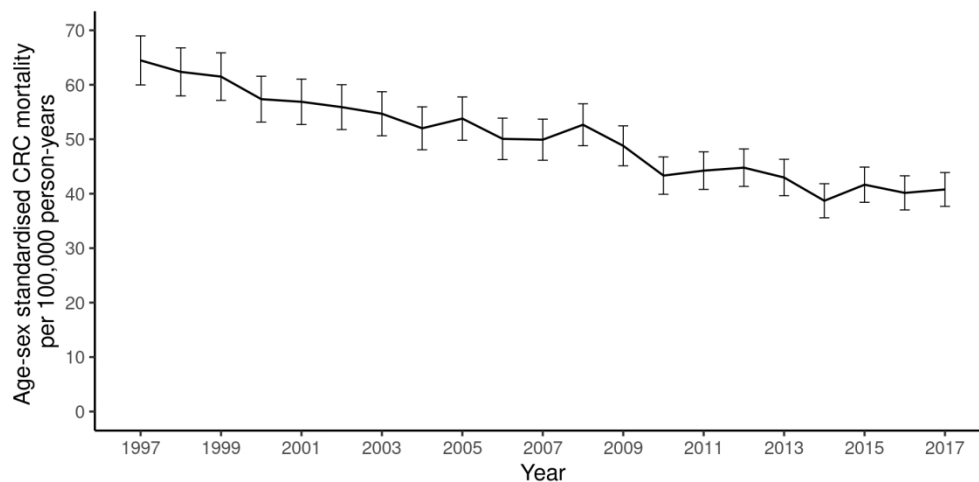
Year	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+
2001	18 (8.2%)	44 (20.0%)	49 (22.3%)	77 (35.0%)	32 (14.5%)	- (0.0%)
2002	28 (8.6%)	48 (14.8%)	100 (30.9%)	102 (31.5%)	46 (14.2%)	- (0.0%)
2003	25 (6.8%)	67 (18.3%)	80 (21.9%)	112 (30.6%)	82 (22.4%)	- (0.0%)
2004	26 (7.0%)	60 (16.1%)	90 (24.1%)	117 (31.4%)	80 (21.4%)	- (0.0%)
2005	21 (5.2%)	68 (16.7%)	71 (17.4%)	110 (27.0%)	126 (31.0%)	11 (2.7%)
2006	21 (5.1%)	50 (12.0%)	82 (19.8%)	117 (28.2%)	116 (28.0%)	29 (7.0%)
2007	42 (8.1%)	68 (13.1%)	101 (19.4%)	113 (21.7%)	127 (24.4%)	69 (13.3%)
2008	56 (6.8%)	84 (10.2%)	152 (18.5%)	184 (22.4%)	222 (27.1%)	122 (14.9%)
2009	93 (7.3%)	144 (11.3%)	217 (17.1%)	277 (21.8%)	318 (25.0%)	222 (17.5%)
2010	132 (6.6%)	212 (10.6%)	351 (17.6%)	423 (21.2%)	505 (25.3%)	372 (18.6%)
2011	160 (6.7%)	247 (10.3%)	394 (16.4%)	539 (22.4%)	593 (24.7%)	470 (19.6%)
2012	158 (6.5%)	243 (10.0%)	391 (16.1%)	530 (21.8%)	579 (23.9%)	525 (21.6%)

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4	2013	160	(6.5%)	266	(10.8%)	355	(14.4%)	531	(21.6%)	556	(22.6%)	594	(24.1%)
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6	2014	152	(6.0%)	248	(9.9%)	319	(12.7%)	532	(21.1%)	523	(20.8%)	743	(29.5%)
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8	2015	172	(6.6%)	212	(8.1%)	361	(13.8%)	468	(17.9%)	502	(19.2%)	899	(34.4%)
9													
10	2016	183	(6.6%)	270	(9.8%)	350	(12.7%)	490	(17.8%)	574	(20.8%)	887	(32.2%)
11													
12	2017	165	(5.7%)	267	(9.2%)	375	(13.0%)	492	(17.0%)	596	(20.6%)	993	(34.4%)
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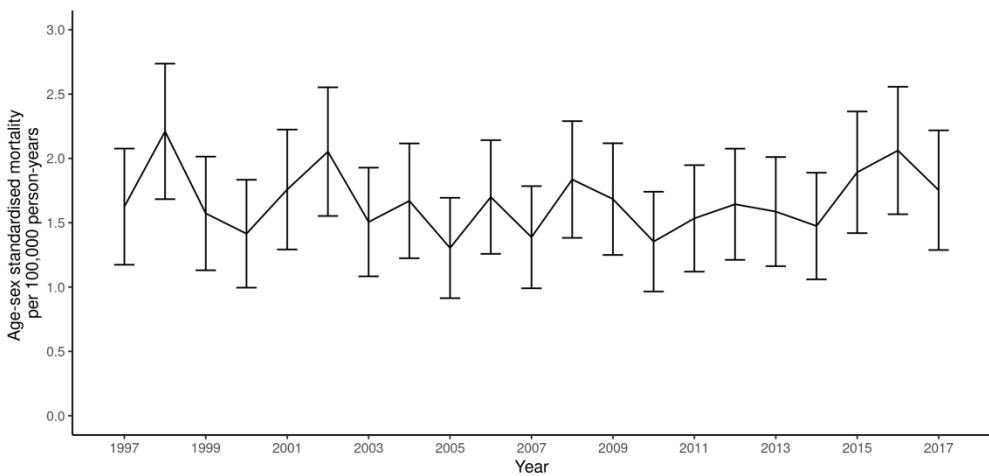


Supplementary Figure 1. Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by sex and screening participation status



Supplementary Figure 2. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).

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Supplementary Figure 3. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages under 50 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).

STROBE Statement—checklist of items that should be included in reports of observational studies

	Item No	Recommendation	Page No
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	4-5
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	7-8
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	8
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	7-8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	9-11
Participants	6	(a) <i>Cohort study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up <i>Case-control study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of case ascertainment and control selection. Give the rationale for the choice of cases and controls <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants	9-10
		(b) <i>Cohort study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed <i>Case-control study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and the number of controls per case	N/A
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-10
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9-10
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	10-11
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	9
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	9-10
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	10-11
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	9-10
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	N/A
		(d) <i>Cohort study</i> —If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed <i>Case-control study</i> —If applicable, explain how matching of cases and controls was addressed <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of sampling strategy	N/A
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	N/A

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Results			
Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	12
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	N/A
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	N/A
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	12-13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	N/A
		(c) <i>Cohort study</i> —Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	12-14
Outcome data	15*	<i>Cohort study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	12-14
		<i>Case-control study</i> —Report numbers in each exposure category, or summary measures of exposure	N/A
		<i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures	N/A
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	12-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	N/A
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	N/A
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	12-14
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations	19	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias	14-15
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	15-16
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	16-17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	19

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

BMJ Open

Variation in changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer by age and association with screening uptake; an observational study.

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID	bmjopen-2020-037925.R2
Article Type:	Original research
Date Submitted by the Author:	27-Jul-2020
Complete List of Authors:	Clark, Gavin; NHS Scotland National Services Division Anderson, Annie; university of dundee, Centre for public health nutrition research Godfrey, Thomas; NHS Scotland National Services Division Strachan, Judith; NHS Tayside, Blood Sciences Fraser, Callum; University of Dundee, Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening Steele, Robert; University of Dundee, Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening
Primary Subject Heading:	Gastroenterology and hepatology
Secondary Subject Heading:	Oncology, Public health
Keywords:	GASTROENTEROLOGY, ONCOLOGY, PUBLIC HEALTH

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11 Gavin RC Clark, Annie S Anderson (0000-0002-0047-4500), Thomas G Godfrey, Judith
12
13 A Strachan, Callum G Fraser (0000-0002-1333-7994), Robert JC Steele (0000-0003-
14
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16
17
18
19
20 Information Services Division, NHS National Services Scotland, Edinburgh EH12 9EB,
21
22 Scotland, UK

23
24
25 Gavin RC Clark senior information analyst

26
27 Thomas G Godfrey information analyst

28
29 Centre for Public Health Nutrition, University of Dundee, Ninewells Hospital and Medical
30
31 School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

32
33
34 Annie S Anderson professor

35
36 Department of Blood Sciences and Scottish Bowel Screening Laboratory, Ninewells
37
38 Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

39
40
41 Judith A Strachan consultant clinical scientist

42
43 Centre for Research into Cancer Prevention and Screening, University of Dundee,
44
45 Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK

46
47
48 Callum G Fraser, honorary professor,

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50 Robert JC Steele, senior research professor
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Emails:

Gavin RC Clark, gavin.clark2@nhs.net

Annie S Anderson, a.s.anderson@dundee.ac.uk

Thomas G Godfrey, thomas.godfrey@nhs.net

Judith A Strachan, judith.strachan@nhs.net

Callum G Fraser, callum.fraser@nhs.net

Robert JC Steele, r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

Corresponding author: Professor Robert JC Steele, Mailbox 4, Level 7, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY, Scotland, UK.

Email: r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

Telephone: + 44 (0)1382 3835444

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5 **Keywords:** adenoma, colorectal cancer, faecal occult blood test, incidence, mortality,
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7 screening
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11 **Abbreviations:** CRC: colorectal cancer, FIT: faecal immunochemical test for
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13 haemoglobin, gFOBT: guaiac faecal occult blood testing, HDI: human development
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15 index, NRS: National Records Scotland, RCT: randomised controlled trial, SBSDB:
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17 Scottish Bowel Screening Database, SCR: Scottish Cancer Registry, SEER:
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19 Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results, UK: United Kingdom, USA: United States
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Abstract

Objectives - In developed countries, the incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) has declined in the over 50 years age group but increased in younger people. We studied CRC incidence by age and the influence of screening uptake.

Design - Age and sex-standardised incidence for CRC from 1997 to 2017 were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry (SCR). In addition, linkage between the Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD) and the SCR allowed investigation of any association between screening participation and CRC incidence.

Setting – Scotland and the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme, in which guaiac faecal occult blood test screening was piloted from March 2000 and fully rolled by December 2009.

Participants – From the introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 were invited to participate, of whom 1,487,999 participated at least once.

Main outcome measures – Incidence of CRC.

Results - In the screening age range (50-74 years), CRC incidence peaked at 156.5 cases per 100,000 in 2010 after full roll-out of screening across Scotland but fell to 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017. However, under 50 years, there was a rise of from 5.3

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3 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8 per 100,000 in 2017. When CRC incidence was
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5 examined in those who had been offered screening, incidence fell in the participant
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7 group more than in the non-participant group after roll-out of screening was complete.
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10 Analysis of cumulative incidence demonstrated that CRC incidence in the participant
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12 group remained consistently below that of the non-participant from around seven years
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14 of follow-up.
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19 **Conclusions** - The incidence of colorectal cancer (CRC) in Scotland has declined in
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21 the over 50 years age groups but increased in younger people. It is likely that population
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23 screening has contributed to the reduction in CRC incidence in the over 50 years age
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25 group.
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- We examine age and sex-standardised incidence data for colorectal cancer for the years 1997 to 2017 obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry and linkage between the Registry and the Scottish Bowel Screening Database.
- We are able to show previously unreported changes in the incidence of colorectal cancer in Scotland in all age groups.
- We are able to examine in detail, for the first time, if population-based screening using faecal occult blood tests is associated with incidence of colorectal cancer.
- Associations between incidence and plausible reasons for the changes over time will help the development of future interventions.
- Although this was a large study, we did not examine incidence by yearly age, only in three large groups.

Introduction

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is a major health problem worldwide. In Scotland, it is currently the third most commonly diagnosed non-cutaneous cancer and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths.¹ However, the incidence of CRC varies widely across the world and it is estimated that 60% of CRC deaths occur in those countries with a high or very high human development index (HDI).² Western lifestyle factors, including obesity, lack of physical exercise, a diet rich in red and processed meat, smoking, and alcohol, have all been linked to the risk of developing CRC,³ and marked increases in both incidence and mortality have been observed in many medium-high HDI countries, especially in Asia, South America and Eastern Europe.² However, both incidence and mortality have either stabilised or declined in countries with the highest HDI, e.g., Australia, New Zealand, United States of America (USA), and several Western European countries.⁴ These reductions in mortality are likely to be attributable to improved access to high quality treatment and earlier diagnosis through both screening and through prompt investigation of those presenting with symptoms.

The declines in incidence are not so easy to explain, especially since the frequency of obesity continues to rise in all high HDI countries.⁵ However, there is now good evidence, largely from the USA and particularly from the Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) database that, while incidence has been falling since around 1985 in those aged 50 years and over, it has been rising in those under 50 years since the mid-1990s.³ In a recent analysis of incidence and mortality databases from 39

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3 countries, it was confirmed that countries with the highest HDI had a decrease in CRC
4 incidence, but that incidence of colon and rectal cancers has continued to increase in
5 countries with medium–high HDI, and in younger populations.⁶ It has been postulated
6 that screening may be responsible for the reduction in incidence in the group aged over
7 50 years, especially where this is associated with high rates of large bowel endoscopy,
8 which facilitates the diagnosis and removal of pre-malignant adenomas.³ Since there is
9 now robust evidence from randomised trials of endoscopic screening that removal of
10 adenoma leads to a reduction in CRC incidence,⁷ this is an attractive hypothesis, but
11 one that is difficult to test.
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26 In Scotland, CRC screening, initially using biennial guaiac faecal occult blood tests
27 (gFOBT), was rolled out to the whole of the population aged 50-74 years in 2007 after a
28 three screening rounds pilot which started in 2000.^{8,9} In addition, Scotland, along with
29 the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), is ranked as having a very high HDI,² and
30 although the incidence has fallen by 18.6% from 2007 to 2017,¹ it still has a high
31 incidence of CRC,¹ and lifestyle factors associated with CRC are prevalent in the
32 population.¹⁰ We therefore examined the incidence of CRC between 1997 and 2017 in
33 the 50-74 years screening age range, the post-screening age range, and the pre-
34 screening age range. In addition, the effect of screening participation on CRC incidence
35 was assessed.
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Methods

In Scotland, screening for CRC using biennial gFOBT, offered to everyone in the 50-69 years age range and registered with a general practitioner, commenced in March 2000 with a pilot involving three of the fourteen NHS Boards responsible for routine health care. Roll-out to the rest of Scotland began in July 2007 and was completed by December 2009. The age range was also extended up to age 74 years for the whole of Scotland during roll-out. Details of the pilot, roll-out and descriptions of the screening algorithms have been published previously.^{8,9} Data are collected centrally by the Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland and held in the Scottish Bowel Screening Database (SBSD).

To assess changes in the incidence of CRC in different age ranges around the time of the introduction of screening, data were obtained from the Scottish Cancer Registry (SCR) for the years 1997 to 2017. Crude incidence rates were calculated by sex and five-year age group using mid-year population estimates from the National Records of Scotland (NRS). These rates were then directly standardised using the 2013 European Standard Population. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated separately for the screening (50-74 years), post-screening (75 years and higher), and pre-screening (under 50 years) age ranges. Age-sex standardised CRC mortality rates were also calculated for the screening (50-74 years) and pre-screening (under 50 years) age ranges using death registration data from NRS.

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5 To investigate the impact of screening participation on incidence, linkage was carried
6 out between the SBSDB, the SCR and NRS deaths. The SBSDB allowed identification of
7 those invited for screening and those who participated. Participants who received a
8 positive or negative screening test result at any point were included in the participant
9 cohort. Those who did not receive a positive or negative test result, or never returned a
10 completed test, were included in the non-participant cohort. Data were included from the
11 pilot through to national roll-out, with the data on invites available from March 2000.
12 Linkage with the SCR allowed CRC incidence to be calculated for the participant and
13 non-participant groups and linkage with the NRS deaths records allowed removal of
14 participants from study at the point of death. Follow-up data were available to 31
15 December 2017. Age-sex standardised rates were calculated for participant and non-
16 participant groups as described above.
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35 The age structure of the screening population changed a great deal in the early years of
36 the study period (see Supplementary Table 1). The ageing of the original pilot cohort, in
37 addition to the expansion of the age-range on national rollout, influence the annual CRC
38 incidence rate, despite adjustment through standardisation. In addition, any reduction
39 seen in annual CRC incidence could be influenced by a shortening time to diagnosis.
40 That is, since cancers are detected earlier, the years after roll-out see a reduction in
41 incidence exclusively due to early detection rather than to prevention of disease. To
42 better analyse these issues, time-to-event analysis was used in addition to the
43 descriptive time-series analysis. This facilitated better understanding of the relationship
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3 between participation in screening and how it affects an individual's risk over time.

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5 Cumulative incidence was estimated using the Kaplan-Meier method. Cox regression
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7 was also used to estimate the impact of screening participation on time from invite to
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9 CRC diagnosis, adjusting for age at first invite, sex, and level of socioeconomic status
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11 as determined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
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17 An underlying assumption of Cox regression is that of proportional hazards, i.e., that the
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19 ratio of the hazards between treatment and non-treatment groups remains constant
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21 over time. This assumption was not met for the participation status variable, since the
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23 CRC hazard increases at biennial intervals for the participant group, consistent with
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25 screening participation. In consequence, an alternative analytical approach is also
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27 presented, with separate hazard ratios reported for less than, and more than, seven
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29 years of follow-up. Seven years was chosen as the cut-off because participant
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31 cumulative incidence is consistently lower than non-participant (and the proportional
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33 hazards assumption is met) from this point. All analyses were performed using R
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35 statistical software, version 3.5.1 and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are shown as bars
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37 in the Figures, when relevant.
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45 Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in
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47 development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of
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49 this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable. Formal
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51 ethical approval for the study was not required because individual participants were not
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53 approached and only routinely collected population-based data were used.
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5 The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the
6 collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the
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8 decision to submit the paper for publication.
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14 All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at
15 r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk
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21 **Results**

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26 77,262 CRC were diagnosed in Scotland between 1997 and 2017. From the
27 introduction of screening in 2000 through to 2017, 2,395,172 individuals were invited to
28 participate (409,255 in the Pilot, 1,985,917 in the Programme), of whom 1,487,999
29 participated at least once. There were 24,817 CRC diagnosed within the population
30 invited to screen (15,663 in participants, 9,154 in non-participants) in the same period.
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32 These CRC were detected through both screening and non-screening pathways.
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42 In the 50-74 years (screening) age range, a slight drop in incidence was observed, from
43 154.4 cases per 100,000 in 2000, the first year of the demonstration pilot, to 137.8 in
44 2006. Then, coinciding with commencement of roll-out of screening across the country
45 in 2007, an increase was noted, which peaked at 156.5 cases per 100,000 in 2010 and
46 began to fall to levels well below those seen in the immediate pre-screening period,
47 reaching 123.9 per 100,000 in 2017 (Figure 1). In those aged 75 years and over (post-
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3 screening), a consistent drop in incidence was noted from 2009 (432.5 per 100,000) to
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5 2017 (366.8 per 100,000) (Figure 2) whereas, in those aged under 50 years (pre-
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7 screening) a rise throughout the study period from 5.3 cases per 100,000 in 2000 to 6.8
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9 per 100,000 in 2017 was seen, albeit with fluctuations (Figure 3).

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15 When CRC incidence in the population who had been offered screening was examined,
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17 there was a distinct difference between those who had participated at least once and
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19 those who never participated. The data shown are age and sex-standardised since
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21 these variables influence both CRC incidence and uptake of screening, with both uptake
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23 and incidence increasing with age, and with uptake being lower, but incidence higher, in
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25 men than in women.¹¹ Figure 4 shows that incidence increased more in the participant
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27 group than in the non-participant group as national roll-out of screening started but that,
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29 after roll-out had been completed, incidence fell in the participant group to a greater
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31 extent than in the non-participant group, with participant incidence 13.9% below non-
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33 participant in 2017. The large increase in incidence in 2005 was due to there being no
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35 invitees in the over 75 years age range prior to this point (see Supplementary Table 2).
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37 Since the CRC risk in the over 75 years age range is higher than in those aged below
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39 75 years, the age-standardised rates are influenced by this ageing of the invited
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41 population.
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49 Analysis of cumulative incidence shown in Figure 5 demonstrates the risk of developing
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51 CRC over time. Fluctuations can be seen initially in the participant group, consistent
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53 with the biennial screening interval. The participant group then remains consistently
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3 below that of the non-participant group from around seven years of follow-up. Cox
4 regression analysis adjusted for age at first invite, sex and socioeconomic deprivation
5 gave a hazard ratio of 0.92 for participants, relative to non-participants (95% CI: 0.90-
6 0.95, $p < 0.001$). The hazard ratios, when separating the follow-up period at seven
7 years, were 0.95 (95% CI: 0.92-0.98, $p < 0.001$) in the period up to seven years and
8 0.87 (95% CI: 0.83-0.91, $p < 0.001$) in the period seven years or more. These data are
9 shown separately for males and females in Supplementary Figure 1.
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21 We also examined mortality in the 50-74 years (screening) and the under 50 years (pre-
22 screening) age groups. These data, with 95%CI, are given as Supplementary Figures 2
23 and 3, and show a substantial reduction in mortality since the introduction of screening
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32 and 3, and show a substantial reduction in mortality since the introduction of screening

33 Discussion

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37 **Statement of principal findings** - The findings in this study have similarities with those
38 reported in from other high-income countries,^{4,6} namely that the incidence of CRC is
39 falling in older age groups but increasing in people under the age of 50 years.
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42 However, in this study, we were not only able to examine the changes in CRC incidence
43 by age, but also by screening participation, and this demonstrated, for the first time to
44 our knowledge, that the fall in incidence was more evident in those who had participated
45 in screening.
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Strengths and weaknesses in relation to other studies - The Minnesota randomised controlled trial (RCT), which employed mostly rehydrated Hemoccult II giving a positivity of 9.8 %, did demonstrate a modest reduction in the groups offered screening after 18 years of follow-up,¹² but the Nottingham RCT, which used gFOBT in un-rehydrated form (the same approach that was adopted in Scotland) and reported a 2% positivity, showed no effect on CRC incidence after 11 years.¹³ Overall, previous studies of the effect of gFOBT screening on CRC incidence have not shown a substantial effect. In Scotland, from December 2009, biennial gFOBT screening was being offered to the whole of the eligible population. This resulted in a positivity of around 2%, so that, with an average uptake at this time of 55%, only around 1% of people being offered screening actually underwent colonoscopy.⁹ Of those that did, the average positive predictive value of gFOBT for CRC was 10% and 40% for adenoma,⁹ so that less than 0.5% of the population offered screening (the 50-74 year age range) would have had removal of adenoma. However, in the present study, the groups were much bigger than in the RCT and the reduction in incidence seen in the 50-74 years age range is likely to have been due, at least in part, to polypectomy following a positive screening test result. The rise in incidence immediately after roll-out and preceding the consistent fall is likely to have been due to the well-described screening effect caused by a combination of early and over-diagnosis.¹⁴ This would not explain the later fall in incidence, however, since the incidence of disease after the introduction of screening tends not to fall back to baseline because of over-diagnosis (i.e., some people with screen-detected disease would have never presented clinically) as is the case in breast cancer screening.¹⁵

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3 It could be argued that a fall in incidence would not necessarily translate into a fall in
4 mortality, if only indolent cancers were being prevented. However, this is highly
5 unlikely, given that the fall in incidence seen in the flexible sigmoidoscopy screening
6 trials was accompanied by reductions in mortality.⁷ In addition, just as North America,
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8 Oceania and most European countries,⁶ CRC mortality in the 50-74 years age range in
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10 Scotland has fallen over time and it is likely that part of this effect can be attributed to
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12 early detection and prevention of disease as a result of screening.¹⁶ It is also interesting
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14 that we did not observe a fall in CRC mortality in the under 50 years age range, lending
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16 further strength to the argument that screening has contributed to this trend.
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26 **Meaning of the study** - In November 2017, the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme
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28 changed the screening test from gFOBT to a quantitative faecal immunochemical test
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30 (FIT) at a threshold of 80 µg haemoglobin/g faeces. At this threshold, in the first year of
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32 screening with FIT, there was a 100% relative increase in the number of participants
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34 with adenomas identified,¹⁷ so that, going forward, screening using FIT can be expected
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36 to bring about a greater reduction in CRC incidence than has been seen to date and this
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38 will be examined when the data become available. The other very important
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40 consideration is the increase in CRC incidence seen in younger people. One approach
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42 to this could be to extend screening to those aged under 50 years, but it must be borne
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44 in mind that, under the age of 50 years, although incidence is increasing,¹⁸ it is still
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46 much lower than in the current screening age range.
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3 **Unanswered questions and future research** - There is no objective evidence yet to
4 support screening under the age of 50 years, and other approaches, including improved
5 awareness of symptoms, increased use of FIT to triage patients presenting in primary
6 care with symptoms¹⁹ and addressing lifestyle issues in the Scottish population must be
7 part of the solution. The reasons underlying the marked increase in incidence in those
8 aged under 50 years are not clear, but may relate to lifestyle factors, particularly around
9 diet, body weight and physical activity, all of which are associated with increased risk of
10 CRC.²⁰ Rising rates of obesity in younger life (which are indicators of diet and physical
11 activity) are of particular interest, because excess adiposity is now experienced by more
12 people at earlier life stages and a recent study has demonstrated a relationship
13 between body mass index in childhood and risk of adult CRC.²¹ We cannot necessarily
14 screen our way out of this problem
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33 Observational data such as these cannot prove definitively that screening is the only
34 cause of reduced incidence. Over the age of 50 years, individuals are much more likely
35 to undergo colonoscopy because of lower bowel symptoms than those under 50 years,
36 and this may explain at least part of the incidence reduction in those aged over 50
37 years. It is interesting that, in the over 75 years age range, a consistent decline in
38 incidence was seen from 2009 onwards. Some of this cohort will have had the
39 opportunity to return screening tests, but by no means all, and it is likely that
40 colonoscopy for the investigation of symptoms is performed even more frequently in this
41 age range.
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3 However, the clear separation of yearly and cumulative incidence by participation in
4 screening lends persuasive evidence to the hypothesis that screening is at least in part
5 responsible for the observed incidence patterns in the population. It could still be
6 argued that the people who participated in screening were healthier than those who did
7 not, and that lifestyle factors were also responsible for this observation but, given the
8 clear effect of removal of adenomas on CRC incidence,⁷ it is highly likely that screening
9 played an important role.
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21 **Contributor statement**

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26 GRCC collected and analysed the data, participated in data interpretation, and
27 contributed to writing the paper. AAS contributed on dietary issues, participated in data
28 interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. TGG assisted with analysing and
29 validating the data, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the
30 paper. JAS directed the laboratories that analysed the faecal tests in the SBoSP from
31 2010, participated in data interpretation, and contributed to writing the paper. CGF
32 directed the SBoSP laboratories to 2010, participated in data interpretation, and
33 provided significant input into the writing of the paper. RJCS is Clinical Director of the
34 SBoSP, initiated the study, led the data interpretation, and wrote first and final drafts of
35 the paper, and is guarantor. The corresponding author attests that all listed authors
36 meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.
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28 **Declaration of interests**

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33 All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at
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35 www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: CGF did consultancy for Immunostics
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37 Inc, Ocean, NJ, USA, and does for Hitachi Chemical Diagnostic Systems Co., Ltd,
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39 Tokyo, Japan; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced
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41 the submitted work have been done.
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46 **Acknowledgements**

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51 and Information Services Divisions.
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Patient and public involvement statement

Neither patients, participants in screening, nor the public were involved in any way in development of the research question, the design of the study, or any other aspect of this research. Dissemination to these groups is not possible nor applicable.

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The Scottish Government, funders of the study, played no role in study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the paper for publication. Award/Grant number not applicable.

Data sharing

All requests for data sharing should be discussed, in the first instance, with RJCS at r.j.c.steele@dundee.ac.uk

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Legends to Figures

Figure 1. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 2. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages 75 years and over, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 3. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence, ages less than 50 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 4. Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer incidence for the screening population per 100,000 person-years, by screening participation status (95% confidence intervals shown)

Figure 5. Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by screening participation status

Legends to Supplementary Tables and Figures

Supplementary Table 1

Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by year, in six age groups (years)

Supplementary Table 2.

Age distribution of colorectal cancers, by year, in six age groups (years)

Supplementary Figure 1.

Cumulative colorectal cancer incidence, by sex and screening participation status

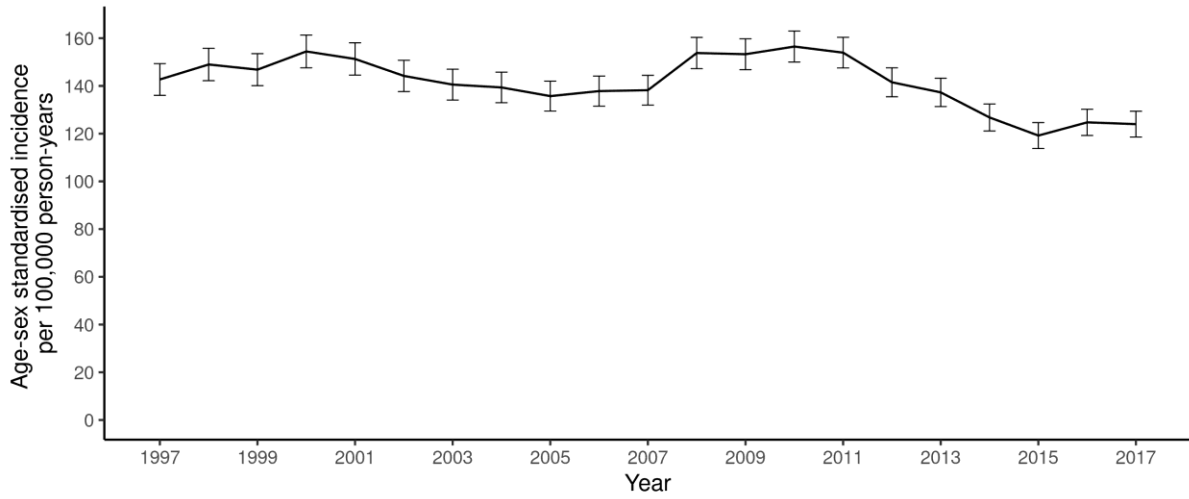
Supplementary Figure 2.

Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages 50-74 years, from 1997 to 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).

Supplementary Figure 3.

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3 Age-sex standardised colorectal cancer mortality, ages under 50 years, from 1997 to
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5 2017 per 100,000 person-years (95% confidence intervals shown).
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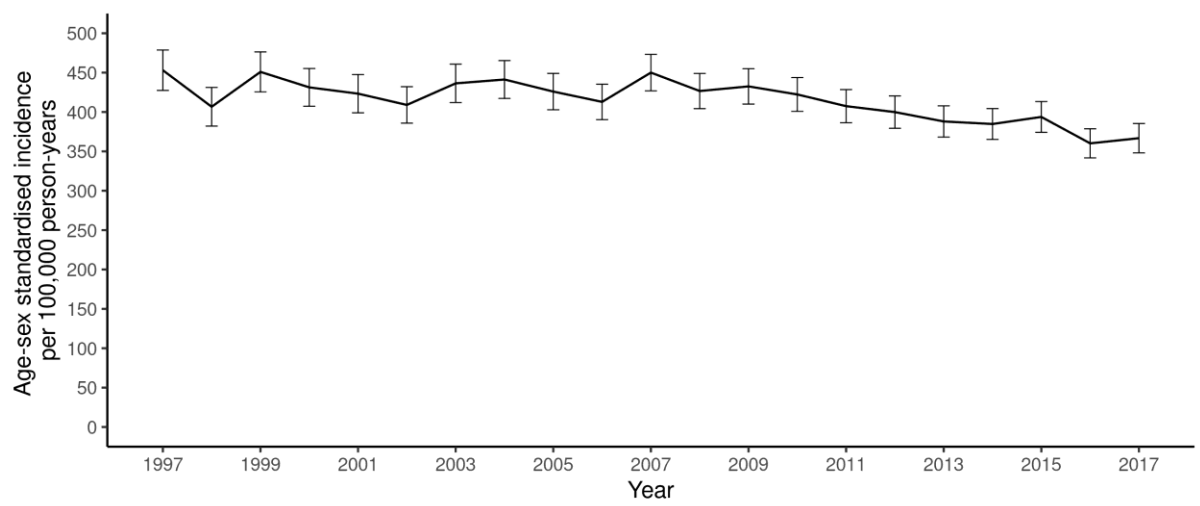
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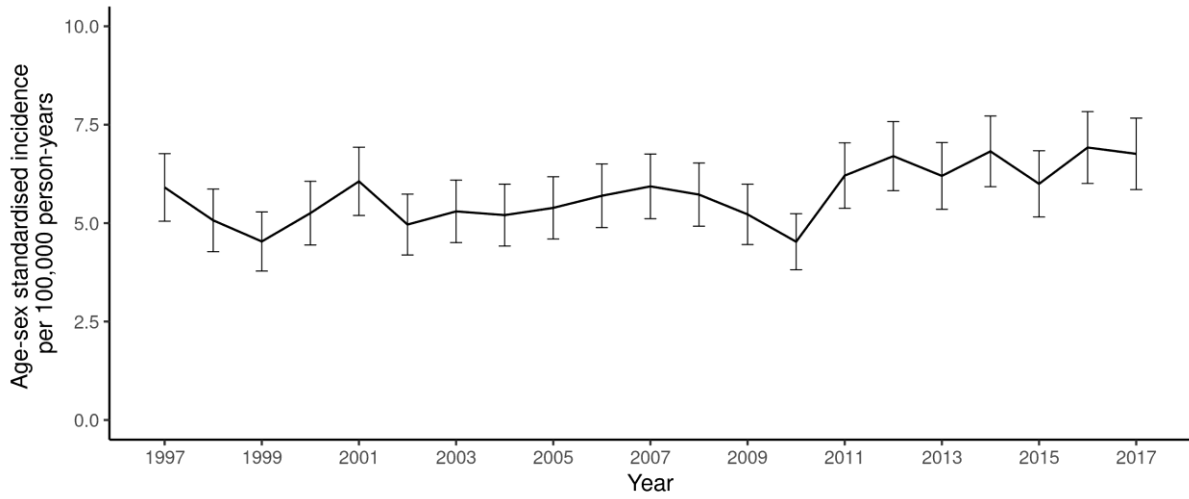
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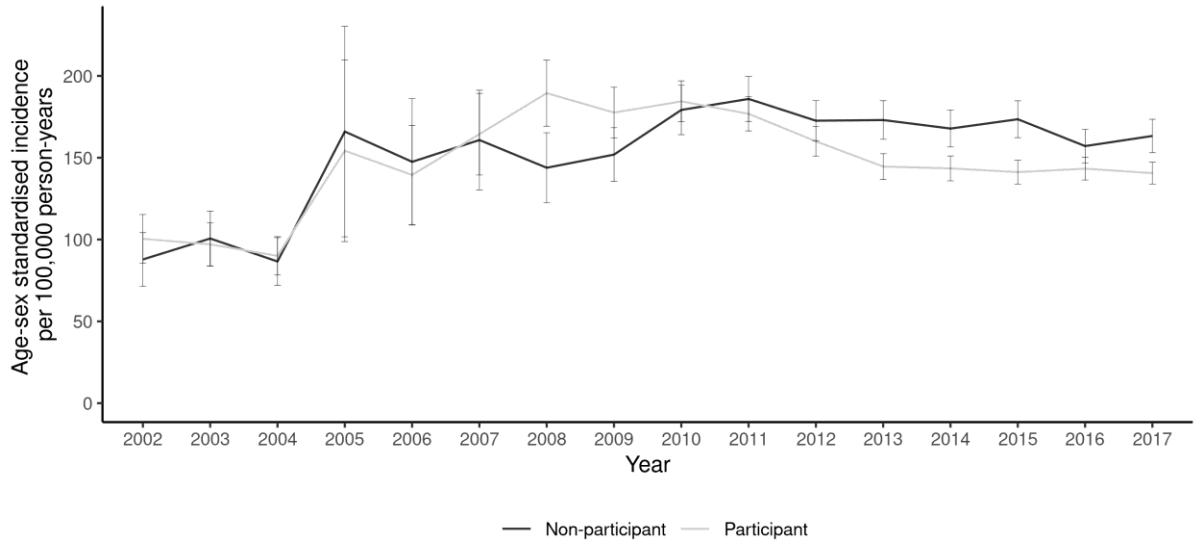
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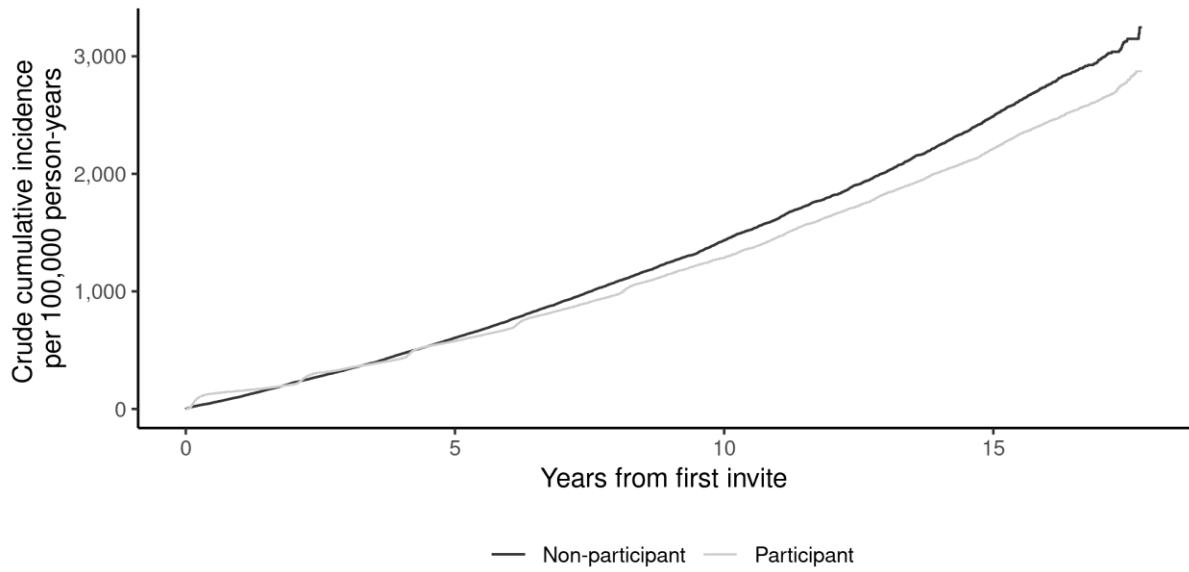
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Supplementary Table 1: Age distribution of screening and post-screening population, by year, in six age groups (years)

Year	Age distribution of population, n (%),											
	50-54		55-59		60-64		65-69		70-74		75+	
2001	54,240	(26.4%)	51,239	(25.0%)	44,137	(21.5%)	42,905	(20.9%)	12,679	(6.2%)	-	(0.0%)
2002	61,490	(22.2%)	74,204	(26.8%)	60,079	(21.7%)	57,307	(20.7%)	23,851	(8.6%)	-	(0.0%)
2003	65,241	(21.5%)	81,141	(26.7%)	63,410	(20.9%)	59,472	(19.6%)	34,581	(11.4%)	-	(0.0%)
2004	67,571	(20.5%)	87,062	(26.4%)	68,088	(20.6%)	61,739	(18.7%)	45,561	(13.8%)	-	(0.0%)
2005	62,874	(18.2%)	92,267	(26.7%)	70,813	(20.5%)	62,646	(18.2%)	52,651	(15.3%)	3,829	(1.1%)
2006	76,947	(20.2%)	93,881	(24.6%)	78,362	(20.6%)	64,371	(16.9%)	56,093	(14.7%)	11,204	(2.9%)
2007	82,678	(19.7%)	96,401	(23.0%)	88,775	(21.2%)	70,209	(16.7%)	59,571	(14.2%)	21,890	(5.2%)
2008	124,768	(20.9%)	130,326	(21.8%)	120,431	(20.1%)	100,736	(16.8%)	81,370	(13.6%)	40,230	(6.7%)
2009	207,433	(21.4%)	203,613	(21.0%)	192,470	(19.8%)	164,107	(16.9%)	132,759	(13.7%)	70,838	(7.3%)
2010	298,073	(21.6%)	279,971	(20.3%)	279,627	(20.2%)	225,020	(16.3%)	189,222	(13.7%)	109,061	(7.9%)
2011	339,145	(21.0%)	321,494	(20.0%)	317,497	(19.7%)	267,034	(16.6%)	218,456	(13.6%)	147,739	(9.2%)

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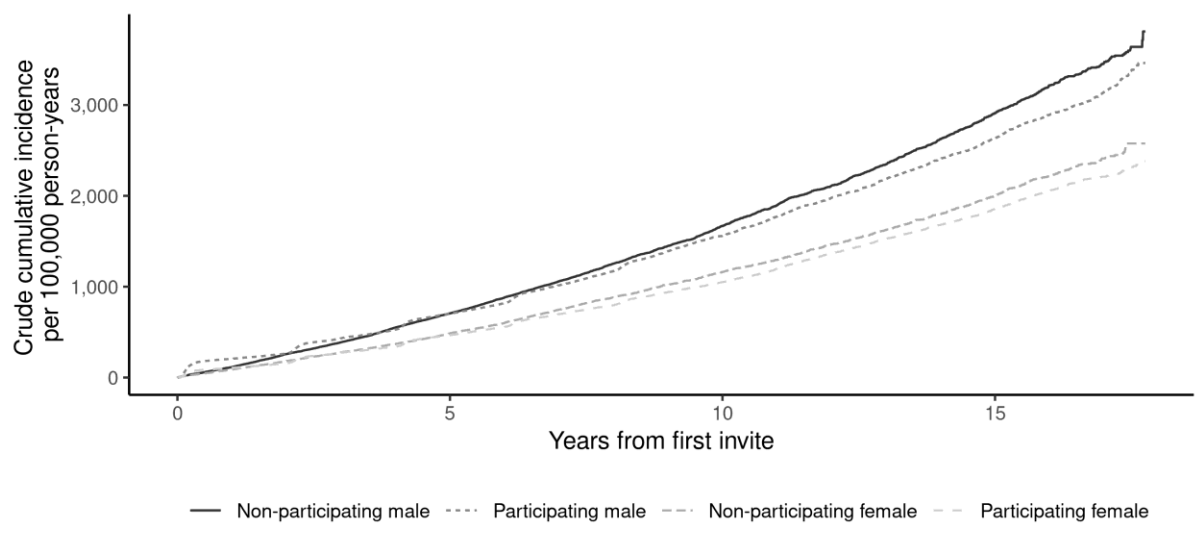
Supplementary Table 2: Age distribution of colorectal cancers, by year, in six age groups (years)

Age distribution of colorectal cancers detected in screening population, n (%)

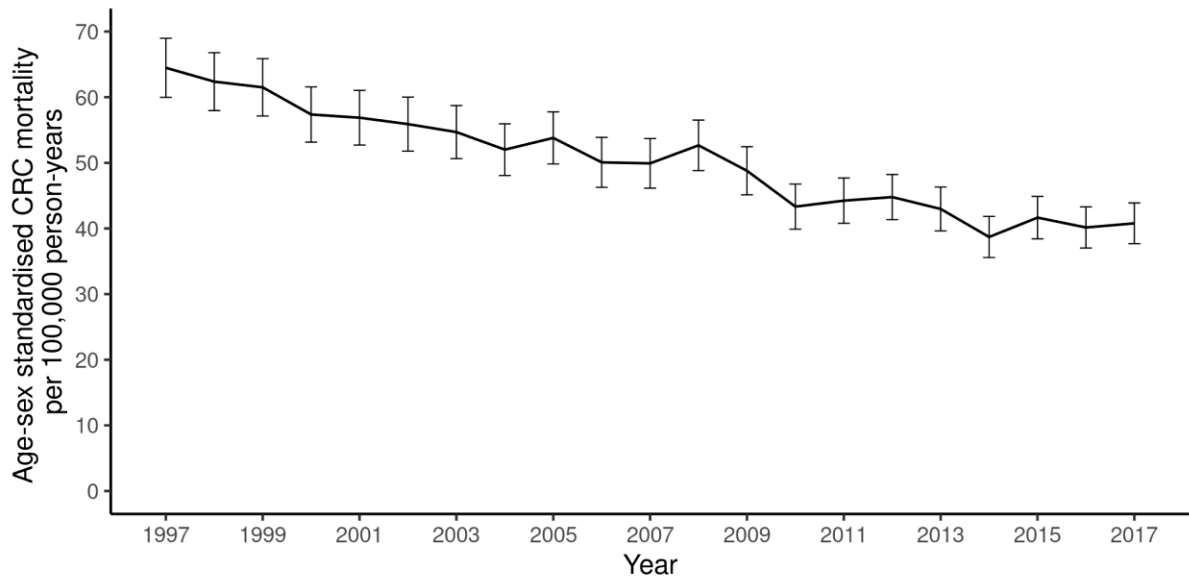
		50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+					
Year												
2001	18	(8.2%)	44	(20.0%)	49	(22.3%)	77	(35.0%)	32	(14.5%)	-	(0.0%)
2002	28	(8.6%)	48	(14.8%)	100	(30.9%)	102	(31.5%)	46	(14.2%)	-	(0.0%)
2003	25	(6.8%)	67	(18.3%)	80	(21.9%)	112	(30.6%)	82	(22.4%)	-	(0.0%)
2004	26	(7.0%)	60	(16.1%)	90	(24.1%)	117	(31.4%)	80	(21.4%)	-	(0.0%)
2005	21	(5.2%)	68	(16.7%)	71	(17.4%)	110	(27.0%)	126	(31.0%)	11	(2.7%)
2006	21	(5.1%)	50	(12.0%)	82	(19.8%)	117	(28.2%)	116	(28.0%)	29	(7.0%)
2007	42	(8.1%)	68	(13.1%)	101	(19.4%)	113	(21.7%)	127	(24.4%)	69	(13.3%)
2008	56	(6.8%)	84	(10.2%)	152	(18.5%)	184	(22.4%)	222	(27.1%)	122	(14.9%)
2009	93	(7.3%)	144	(11.3%)	217	(17.1%)	277	(21.8%)	318	(25.0%)	222	(17.5%)
2010	132	(6.6%)	212	(10.6%)	351	(17.6%)	423	(21.2%)	505	(25.3%)	372	(18.6%)
2011	160	(6.7%)	247	(10.3%)	394	(16.4%)	539	(22.4%)	593	(24.7%)	470	(19.6%)
2012	158	(6.5%)	243	(10.0%)	391	(16.1%)	530	(21.8%)	579	(23.9%)	525	(21.6%)

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4	2013	160	(6.5%)	266	(10.8%)	355	(14.4%)	531	(21.6%)	556	(22.6%)	594	(24.1%)
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6	2014	152	(6.0%)	248	(9.9%)	319	(12.7%)	532	(21.1%)	523	(20.8%)	743	(29.5%)
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8	2015	172	(6.6%)	212	(8.1%)	361	(13.8%)	468	(17.9%)	502	(19.2%)	899	(34.4%)
9													
10	2016	183	(6.6%)	270	(9.8%)	350	(12.7%)	490	(17.8%)	574	(20.8%)	887	(32.2%)
11													
12	2017	165	(5.7%)	267	(9.2%)	375	(13.0%)	492	(17.0%)	596	(20.6%)	993	(34.4%)
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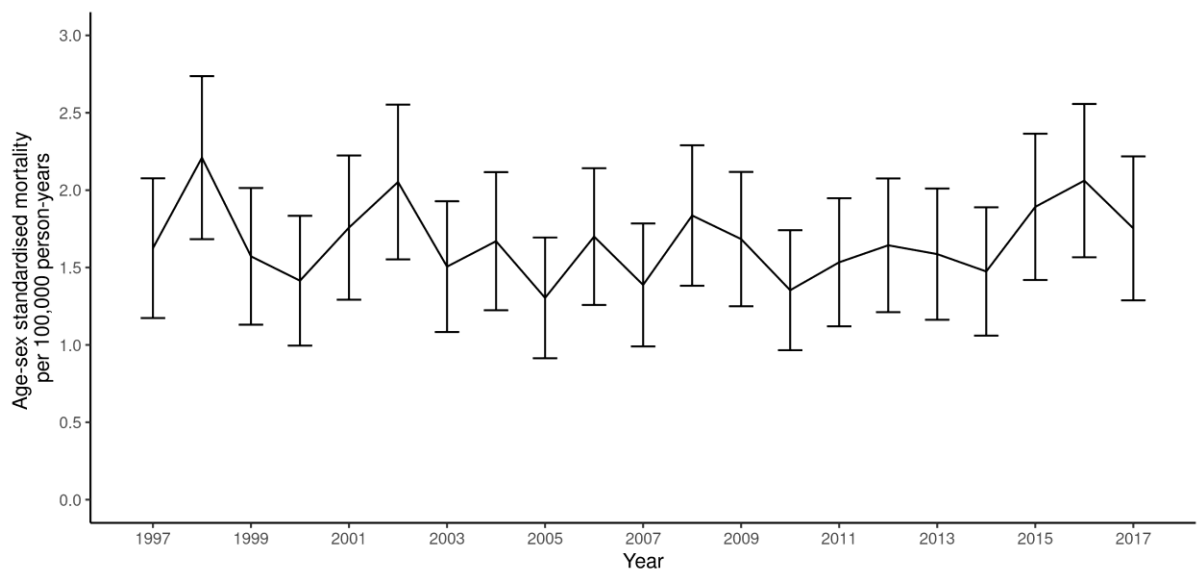


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STROBE Statement—checklist of items that should be included in reports of observational studies

	Item No	Recommendation	Page No
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	4-5
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	7-8
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	8
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	7-8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	9-11
Participants	6	(a) <i>Cohort study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up <i>Case-control study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of case ascertainment and control selection. Give the rationale for the choice of cases and controls <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants	9-10
		(b) <i>Cohort study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed <i>Case-control study</i> —For matched studies, give matching criteria and the number of controls per case	N/A
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-10
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9-10
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	10-11
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	9
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	9-10
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	10-11
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	9-10
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	N/A
		(d) <i>Cohort study</i> —If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed <i>Case-control study</i> —If applicable, explain how matching of cases and controls was addressed <i>Cross-sectional study</i> —If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of sampling strategy	N/A
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	N/A

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60**Results**

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	12
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	N/A
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	N/A
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	12-13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	N/A
		(c) <i>Cohort study</i> —Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	12-14
Outcome data	15*	<i>Cohort study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	12-14
		<i>Case-control study</i> —Report numbers in each exposure category, or summary measures of exposure	N/A
		<i>Cross-sectional study</i> —Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures	N/A
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	12-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	N/A
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	N/A
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	12-14

Discussion

Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations	19	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias	14-15
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	15-16
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	16-17

Other information

Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	19
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*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.