

# Study: Paused colorectal cancer screening during the COVID-19 pandemic: impact and strategies

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Many cancer screening programs and their follow-up testing were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, including those for colorectal cancer, which is projected to be the third-most-diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer-related death in Canada in 2020.

A new study released today projects the future impact of interruptions in colorectal cancer screening, and looks at how the backlog could be cleared as screening resumes. The projections are from OncoSim, a cancer microsimulation model co-developed by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.

OncoSim projections indicated that among the 540,000 Canadians who might have missed their colorectal cancer screening between April 1 and June 30, 2020, nearly 440 could die due to colorectal cancer in the long term if there is no catch up in screening (i.e., if they have to wait until their next scheduled screening, typically every two years).

Among the screening catch up scenarios evaluated, OncoSim projections showed that temporarily increasing the screening test threshold (i.e., the level above which individuals are sent for follow-up colonoscopy) by 25% for a 24-month catch up period would reduce the number of expected excess deaths by 20% (i.e., 90 deaths).

## Note to readers

*The model used in the study released today, OncoSim, uses historical and projected data for the demographic composition of the Canadian population, along with information derived from cancer registries, clinical trials, and the research literature. OncoSim simulates cancer incidence, screening, treatment and mortality for the Canadian population, and has been used to support decision-making at the national, provincial and territorial levels to assess the costs, benefits, cost-effectiveness, and budgetary effects of cancer control interventions and guidelines.*

The study "[Colorectal cancer screening during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impact of paused screening and evaluation of strategies to reduce delays](#)" is now available as part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada* ([45280001](#)).

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