

Four and a half million people in the UK would not see a GP if they were passing blood, study shows

A national poll has revealed that four and a half million people in the UK would not go to a healthcare professional if they found blood in their poo.

Generation Z (18 to 24-year-olds) would delay seeing a GP the longest with one in five (19%) saying they'd take more than a month to see a doctor when they are passing blood - more than twice the UK population average (8%).

In response, charity Crohn's & Colitis UK is launching a national public awareness campaign aimed at young people called Cut The Crap: Get Checked For Crohn's and Colitis.

As part of this it has launched an online symptom checker, developed with doctors, which takes just 30 seconds to find out if you should speak to your GP about your symptoms. It produces a list of your symptoms and can send you a letter for your GP to make talking them through easier.

Charity Crohn's & Colitis UK commissioned a national poll of 10,000 people to find out why one in four people (25%) were taking more than a year to be diagnosed, as revealed in previous research. The earlier survey also showed nearly half (41%) will end up in A&E at least once before they are diagnosed.

Delaying treatment can leave people needing stronger medication or even emergency surgery to remove part of their bowel.

In the national poll, Gen Z had the least awareness that diarrhoea (67% unaware), blood in poo (73% unaware) and stomach pain (69% unaware) could be signs of Crohn's or Colitis, which is the case when they carry on for more than a week. They were also most likely to feel too scared (19% would avoid a GP for this reason) or unconfident in describing symptoms (16% avoiding a GP for this reason) to a GP.

Gen Zs were most likely to delay seeing a GP for over a month when they have persistent diarrhoea (21% compared with the UK population average of 15%), with almost one in five (18%) saying this was because they'd be too embarrassed to discuss their symptoms.

GP Dr Marion Sloan, Chair of the Primary Care Society of Gastroenterology says: "As doctors, we see and examine patients with bowel symptoms on a regular basis, and we appreciate the symptoms can be difficult to talk about. But the more you tell us, the more accurate our diagnosis can be, and the quicker you can get the treatments you need."

The charity Crohn's & Colitis UK said it had been contacted by dozens of young people who had tried to manage symptoms by changing their diet or lifestyle before diagnosis, often using advice from social media. One woman had tried eating only fruit, another jelly while a third had lived on gummy bears and bran flakes for a year.

Musical theatre student and TikTok star Lucy Harman, 20, put off seeing her GP for months, living with debilitating stomach pain, diarrhoea causing weight loss of four stone in 30 days and fainting fits. "I finally decided to seek help when I saw blood in my stools for months at a time, but then I lied about my symptoms because I was scared," she says. "I thought the doctors would not take me seriously or the opposite, take me too seriously. I completed an e-consult and lied about many of my symptoms and they thought I had irritable bowel syndrome so I was told by my GP to take probiotics and Mebeverine."

After a few weeks, Lucy stopped eating to manage her symptoms. She collapsed from malnutrition and dehydration and was taken to hospital with failing organs and collapsed veins. She was diagnosed with Crohn's and treated with steroids and immunosuppressants and is fortunately now well enough to be starring in her end of term show.

On 2 November, Crohn's & Colitis UK is launching its Cut The Crap: Check For Crohn's and Colitis campaign aimed at 18 to 34 year olds. This urges people to stop making excuses to avoid seeing their GP. It also challenges the alternative "cures" touted online that make no difference to people's health when what they need is the right treatment. Many young people turn to social media for unproven remedies (such as eating one type of food only), which poses a risk to people's health, when they need reliable health advice.

Student Lucy welcomed the checker, saying: "When talking to a medical professional about symptoms for the first time it can be very overwhelming, embarrassing and scary and so it's easy to miss things out or make it seem better than it actually is. A check list to take into a GP would make it a lot easier and break down that first barrier of nerves as you don't have to say things yourself."

The campaign is backed by celebrities including Chris Tarrant, whose stepdaughter has Crohn's, Strictly's Amy Dowden and Dr Who's Sacha Dhawan, who both have Crohn's and Made in Chelsea's Louise Thompson and Georgie Shore's Emma McVey, who both have Colitis.

Consultant Nurse Isobel Mason, of Crohn's & Colitis UK, says: "If you ignore the signs of Crohn's and Colitis for too long, treatment becomes more difficult and you are more likely to need stronger medication, hospital admissions or surgery.

"The earlier we diagnose, the earlier we can treat and the better people do, so we'd urge everyone to see their GP as soon as symptoms appear."

Crohn's & Colitis UK CEO Sarah Sleet said: "There already were far too many people waiting over a year for a diagnosis before the pandemic. Since then, that figure will have soared.

"Delays can be devastating, affecting people's ability to do their jobs, go to school or college, socialise or have relationships.

"It is urgent that we do more to help young people stay in control of their health, and that means providing them with the tools to get the right diagnosis from their GP as early as possible.

"Our symptom checker gives people the confidence to go to their GP with a summary of what they've been experiencing, to help them get the right diagnosis and get back on the road to recovery.

For more information visit www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

Editor's notes:

The survey of 10,000 people was carried out independently by Censuswide in August 2022.

IBD UK's survey in 2019 found more than a quarter (26%) of people with Crohn's and Colitis wait more than a year to be diagnosed while nearly half (41%) will end up in A&E at least once before they are diagnosed.

Lucy Harman, Dr Marion Sloan, Sarah Sleet and other case studies around the UK are available for interview. Email Media Lead tamsin.starr@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk or call 07921454578.

Images: [#](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11z021b1dC8aU3fmYiTOW-QAhIGnsdOCa?usp=sharing)

[The campaign film can be downloaded for use in broadcast coverage from here:](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17BZv077IGdlMsjzbWdUCE3rCpCreESrt?usp=share_link)
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17BZv077IGdlMsjzbWdUCE3rCpCreESrt?usp=share_link

The two main forms of inflammatory bowel disease, Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease, affect more than 500,000 people in the UK. In both conditions, the immune system goes into overdrive, attacking healthy tissue in the gut. Inflammatory bowel disease can develop at any age, although one in three will be diagnosed with the condition before they are 30. In the majority of cases, patients first visit their GP with stomach pain, diarrhoea, weight loss or blood in their poo.

If doctors suspect Crohn's or Colitis, they can arrange a poo test. Measuring the level of calprotectin in a poo sample can show whether you have inflammation in your gut. Further tests are then performed in hospital.

Patients are often treated with medicines called aminosalicylates, which reduce inflammation, allowing damaged tissue to heal.

Other options include powerful steroids that lower inflammation by suppressing the immune system. Patients may also require medicines known as biologics, delivered via an intravenous drip in hospital, or by an injection under the skin. Biologic medicines act to block some parts of the immune system, reducing inflammation.

Additional findings:

UK:

Men are more likely than women to ignore serious symptoms: 8% would not see a doctor even if passing blood compared with 5% of women. They are also less likely to recognise the symptoms of Crohn's or Colitis: 60% don't associate main symptom of diarrhoea and stomach pain with Crohn's or Colitis compared with 33-37% of women and nearly 70% don't recognise blood in poo as an indicator (women 53%).

Women are more easily put off booking a GP appointment than men. They are 5% more likely than men to delay seeking help because they think it will be difficult to get an appointment at a time that works for them and 6% more unwilling to talk to a receptionist about their symptoms when booking.

Working people are too busy to take time out for their health. One in 20 people said they couldn't take time off work to see a GP even if they had diarrhoea with blood or mucus and stomach pain. While highest earners are the least likely group to see a GP when they have blood in stools, 17% of whom cite not getting an appointment at a convenient time as a barrier.

NHS pressures are also making people think twice. Almost one in ten people in the UK surveyed said they did not want to put extra strain on the health service by seeing their GPs about symptoms of Crohn's or Colitis.

6% of people in the UK would not go to a healthcare professional if they found blood in their poo (which equates to 4 million people).