

# **Fecal Occult Blood Test (Stool Test)**

## **What It Is**

Bowel movements can provide doctors with valuable information as to what's wrong when your child has a problem in the stomach, intestines, or other part of the gastrointestinal system. The most common reason to collect a stool sample is to determine if there is blood in the stool or whether a type of bacteria or parasite may be infecting the intestine.

While many microscopic organisms live in the intestines that are necessary for normal digestion, sometimes the intestine may become infected with harmful bacteria or parasites that cause a variety of conditions, such as certain types of bloody diarrhea. It may then be necessary to examine the stool under a microscope, culture the stool, and perform other tests to find the cause of the problem. To test the stool, a non-invasive procedure called the Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) is performed. The FOBT test detects hidden (occult) blood in the stool. Such blood may come from anywhere along the digestive tract.

## **Why It's Done**

Your child's doctor may order a stool collection to test for a variety of possible conditions, including:

- Allergy or inflammation in the body
- Infection, as caused by some types of bacteria, viruses, or parasites that invade the gastrointestinal system
- Digestive problems, such as the mal-absorption of certain sugars, fats, or nutrients
- Bleeding inside of the gastrointestinal tract

Stools are also sometimes analyzed for the substances they contain to find mal-absorption or other problems. Stools may be tested for the presence of parasites and ova (the egg stage of a parasite) if a child has prolonged diarrhea or other intestinal symptoms.

## **Preparation**

Unlike most other lab tests, a stool sample is sometimes collected by the child's family at home, not the healthcare professional. Before taking a sample, don't feed your child raw turnips, radishes, broccoli, red meat, or horseradish one to two days before the test, as these foods can make it look like your child has hidden blood in the stool when he or she may not.

Also, your child should avoid the following a week before the test:

- Aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Motrin
- Vitamin C supplements

## **Collecting a Stool Specimen**

Your child's doctor or the hospital laboratory will usually provide written instructions on how to successfully collect a stool sample. If those instructions are not provided, here are some tips for collecting a stool specimen from your child:

- Collecting stool can be messy, so be sure to wear latex gloves and wash your hands and your child's hands afterward.
- Many children with diarrhea, especially young children, can't always let a parent know in advance when a bowel movement is coming. Sometimes a hat-shaped plastic lid is used to collect the stool specimen. This catching device can be quickly placed over the toilet bowl, or your child's rear end, to collect the specimen. Using a catching device can prevent contamination of the stool by water and dirt. If urine contaminates the stool sample, it will be necessary to take another sample. Also, if you're unable to catch your child's stool sample before it touches the inside of the toilet, the sample will need to be repeated. Fishing a bowel movement out of the toilet does not provide a clean specimen for the laboratory to analyze.
- Another way to collect a stool sample is to loosely place plastic wrap over the lid of the toilet. Then place the stool sample in a clean, sealable container before taking it to the lab. Plastic wrap can also be used to line the diaper of an infant or toddler who is not yet using the toilet.
- The stool should be collected into clean, dry plastic jars with screw-cap lids. For best results, the stool should be brought to the lab immediately. If this is impossible, the stool should be refrigerated and then taken to the lab to be cultured as soon as possible after collection.

Swabs from a child's rectum can also be tested for viruses. Although this procedure is not done routinely, it can sometimes give clues in the case of certain illnesses, especially in newborns or very ill children.

### **Getting the Results**

When the sample arrives at the laboratory, it is either examined and cultured immediately, or placed in a special liquid medium preserves potential bacteria or parasites. Most of the time, disease-causing bacteria or parasites can be identified from a single stool specimen. Sometimes, however, up to three samples from different bowel movements must be taken. Your child's doctor will let you know if this is the case.

In general, the results of stool tests are usually reported back within three to four days, although it often takes longer for parasites testing to be completed. Viral cultures from swabs can take a week or longer to grow, depending on the virus.

If parasites, or their eggs, are seen when a smear of stool is examined under the microscope, the child will be treated for a parasitic infestation.

### **Risks**

There are no risks associated with collecting a stool sample.

**Helping Your Child**

Since collecting a stool sample is painless, tell your child that collecting the stool won't hurt, but care needs to be taken in the collection. If your child is old enough, he or she may be able to collect his or her sample alone, so as to avoid embarrassment. Instruct your child how to do this properly.

**If You Have Questions**

If you have questions about the Fecal Occult Blood test procedure, contact your doctor.

**Sources**

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/sick/labtest8.html>

[http://labtestsonline.org/understanding/analytes/fecal\\_occult\\_blood/glance.html](http://labtestsonline.org/understanding/analytes/fecal_occult_blood/glance.html)

<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/oivd/homeuse-occult.html>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/007008.htm>