

Colorectal Cancer and Immunohistochemistry Testing

If you have surgery at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) to remove colorectal cancer, your doctor will do a test called immunohistochemistry (IHC) testing. This factsheet is about IHC testing and what the results could mean for you and your family.

What is IHC testing?

IHC testing looks for four proteins in the cancer your doctors removed. These proteins help your body's cells work properly. About 8 out of 10 IHC tests are normal, which means that all four proteins are found. The test results are not normal if one or more of the proteins are missing.

Why is colorectal IHC testing important?

Most colorectal cancers happen by chance or for reasons we do not yet know. But 5-10 out of 100 people with colorectal cancer got it because they inherited a high cancer risk. Usually a condition called Lynch syndrome causes the higher risk.

IHC testing can help you know if you have Lynch syndrome. If you get testing and your results are not normal, you may have Lynch syndrome. Your doctor will recommend more tests to know for sure.

It is important to know if you have Lynch syndrome because it causes a higher risk for certain types of cancers. If you have it, you and your family may need more screenings to catch cancer early, when it can be easier to treat.

What is Lynch syndrome?

Lynch syndrome runs in families because of gene mutations that pass from one generation to the next. This means several members of one family can have it. Families with Lynch syndrome have a higher risk of several types of cancer:

- Colon
- Rectal
- Endometrial
- Ovarian
- Stomach
- Pancreas
- Prostate
- Urinary tract

If you have Lynch syndrome, you have a high risk of getting more than one cancer. Lynch syndrome also raises the risk of getting cancer at a younger age. You need more screening to find cancer as early as possible, when it can be easier to treat. Screening can even stop cancer from starting at all. Talk to your doctor about how to lower your cancer risk.

What happens after IHC testing?

If IHC testing shows that you are not at high risk for Lynch syndrome, you will get a letter in the mail with your results. IHC testing does not give information about all forms of hereditary colorectal cancer. Your doctor may also have you talk to a genetic counselor.

If you have colon cancer but are not at high risk for Lynch syndrome, your close relatives (parents, siblings, or children) still have a higher risk of also getting colon cancer. Tell your family members to talk to their doctors about their cancer risk and screenings.

If IHC testing shows that you are at high risk for Lynch syndrome, HCI's Family Cancer Assessment Clinic will contact you. You will meet with a genetic counselor and your doctor to talk about more testing for Lynch syndrome and to answer any questions you may have.

Do you have questions about your risk for cancer? Our doctor and genetic counselors can help find the cancer screening plan you need.

Call Huntsman Cancer Institute's Family Cancer Assessment Clinic to learn more: 801-587-9555.