



About Population-Based Screening + Mammograms

Population-based Screening Tests

There are many medical screening tests - prostate cancer screening, genetic screening, etc. given to an individual, as determined by a health care provider. There are also *population-based* screening tests offered to a large, healthy group of people who have been identified as “at risk”. Under the BC Cancer Agency, a *population-based* cancer screening program must demonstrate the following:

- The screening test is effective to administer to the majority of the “at risk” population (e.g., for breast cancer, women after age 40),
- The screening test will find cancer early, and
- Most importantly, finding the cancer early can reduce death rates from the cancer (with some types of cancer, early detection will not change the course of the disease or reduce the death rate.)

The BC Cancer Agency’s Screening Mammogram Program has currently reduced mortality from breast cancer by 25%.

Types of Mammograms

Screening Mammograms	Diagnostic Mammograms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For women with no apparent breast problems or concerns • Monitors breast changes over time (usually once every 24 months) • Detects changes that may require more tests, such as a diagnostic mammogram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For women requiring follow-up with new or past breast concerns, e.g., lump, puckered skin, area of concern on a screening mammogram, etc. • X-rays are taken and may include additional x-rays of the area of concern. The results may lead to more tests, such as an ultrasound, needle biopsy, etc.

Demystifying Urgent Care and Non-urgent Care

There is no such thing as an *emergency* screening mammogram because this test is only for women with no symptoms. A woman with symptoms will go to a doctor to obtain a diagnostic mammogram. Diagnostic mammograms have priority over screening mammograms, which is one reason why wait-times can vary for screening mammograms.

For the *majority* of women, regular screening mammograms can find suspicious areas before they become life-threatening. Most of the cancers found by a regular screening mammogram are small and have usually not spread to the lymph nodes.

Regular screening mammograms are one of the most effective ways to detect breast cancer early and they are available to all eligible BC women between the ages of 40 to 79 through the BC Cancer Agency’s Screening Mammography Program.

Changes are not always Cancer

A woman’s breasts are made up of milk glands; ducts that carry milk to the nipples; fat, blood vessels and nerves. The amount of milk glands, ducts and fat in the breast changes through life. Changes seen on an x-ray can range from calcifications in the milk glands, benign cysts, etc. to breast cancer. When there is a change that requires further testing, women in the Program will receive an abnormal result, this does not mean they have cancer. For every 1000 women, screened, about 70-100 women receive abnormal results and only 3 or 4 women will be found to have cancer.