

Lung Screening

For people who smoke or have a smoking history

Take a positive step for your health by getting screened for lung cancer. Screening is easy, effective and painless.

Lung screening works by finding cancer early, when you are not experiencing any symptoms. When cancer is found early, there are more treatment options and a better chance of success.

Lung screening involves a scan of your lungs using a low-dose CT (LDCT) machine. The scan is free and takes place at a hospital in your community.

Why is lung screening important?

Lung cancer is one of the most diagnosed cancers, and the leading cause of cancer death in British Columbia. Smoking remains the most significant cause of lung cancer, leading to more than 70% of lung cancer deaths in men, and 55% of lung cancer deaths in women.

Usually, lung cancer symptoms don't appear until the disease is already at an advanced stage, and has spread. Early detection through screening can help find cancer in its early stages, when treatment is more successful.

What you should know

- The best way to reduce your risk of lung cancer is to not smoke and to get screened.
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in B.C.
- Smoking remains the most significant cause of lung cancer, resulting in over 70% of lung cancer deaths in men, and 55% of lung cancer deaths in women.

What to expect for lung screening?

Lung screening involves a low-dose CT scan of the lungs. During your scan, you will lie on a table and a doughnut-shaped scanner that uses a small amount of radiation will take detailed images of your lungs. The scan takes less than 10 seconds, and is not painful. You will rest your arms above your head and hold your breath for a few seconds while the scan is taking place. You don't need to take any medications or receive any needles for this test.

The scan looks for signs of lung cancer and other lung diseases. Early detection has been shown to increase the chance of survival of those diagnosed with lung cancer by 20%.

What happens after my lung screening?

After your lung screening, a radiologist looks for spots, also known as nodules on your scan. These spots indicate small lumps of tissue that many people have. Your scan alone cannot tell us whether these spots are scars, areas of inflammation, or cancer. Your next steps are determined by the size and appearance of any spots found. Depending on your results, you may be asked to screen again in 1 to 2 years, or to receive more tests, including more scans or a lung biopsy.

Quitting smoking

Quitting smoking can be hard. However, quitting doubles the benefits of screening, and significantly improves your health. Quitting also improves health outcomes for other tobacco-related diseases, such as heart attack, stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). There are many resources to help support your decision to quit. We will discuss these resources with you during your consultation with the Lung Screening Program.

Who should get lung screening?

Lung screening is best for those who are at high-risk for lung cancer and who are not experiencing any symptoms. This usually includes people who are:

- 55 to 74 years of age;
- Currently smoking or have smoked in the past; and,
- Have a smoking history of 20 years or more.

If you meet these requirements, please call the Lung Screening Program at 1-877-717-5864 to complete a consultation and risk assessment over the phone. If you currently smoke, we will also discuss resources to help you quit smoking over the phone.

Why is lung screening not recommended to everyone?

People who do not meet the above screening requirements are generally not considered high-risk for lung cancer. If you don't have a significant smoking history, lung screening may not be right for you.

Screening is also not suitable for everyone experiencing lung cancer symptoms, including:

- Coughing that does not go away or gets worse;
- Coughing up blood or rust-coloured sputum (spit or phlegm);
- Shortness of breath or chest pain that is always felt and gets worse with deep breathing or coughing.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, please talk to your primary care provider right away.

Things to consider:

- No screening test is perfect. Your lung scan may suggest you have lung cancer when no cancer is present (false-positive). A false-positive result involves additional follow-ups, sometimes surgery, before deciding you do not have cancer. You may experience increased stress and anxiety during this time.
- Your lung scan may also find cases of cancer that are very slow growing and are not expected to cause any problems during your lifetime. This is called overdiagnosis and can lead to treatment that may not benefit you. However, at the time of diagnosis, there is no way for health care professionals to tell whether the cancer will cause any problems without doing additional tests.
- Your lung scan will expose you to a very small amount of radiation, however, the chances of you getting cancer through repeated exposure is very low. A LDCT scan uses 5 times less radiation than a regular CT scan and is similar to what you would receive from the natural background (radiation from the sky and ground) over six months.

Contact Us

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