

Lung Screening Program Frequently Asked Questions

Lung Screening Program

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1. What is lung cancer?

Lung cancer is a cancer that starts in the lungs. Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers in Nova Scotia.

2. What is lung screening?

Lung screening is about looking for lung cancer when you are feeling well and have no warning signs or symptoms. The goal is to find lung cancer early when treatment works best.

3. What if I have symptoms that I think might be lung cancer?

The Lung Screening Program is for people who do not have symptoms. The wait time for the screening program can be very long and the testing is different if you have symptoms.

If you do have symptoms, do not call the program; you should talk with a health care provider. If you do not have a health care provider, you can register for an online visit with a doctor or nurse practitioner at Virtual Care NS. If your symptoms are severe or worrisome, call 811 or visit your local emergency room.

Learn more online at: <https://nshealth.ca/content/virtualcarens>

Warning signs or symptoms of lung cancer may include:

- A cough that does not get better
- Coughing up blood / spitting up blood (even a small amount)
- Chest pain
- Hoarse voice that does not improve
- Losing weight (without trying to lose weight)
- Being tired or weak for no reason
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Many chest infections
- Bone pain

4. What is the Nova Scotia Lung Screening Program?

The Lung Screening Program is operated by Nova Scotia Health's Cancer Care Program.

The goal of the Lung Screening Program is to prevent lung cancer and to find lung cancer at an earlier stage when treatments work best. Contacting the Lung Screening Program is a step you can take for your health.

The lung screening program has three parts :

- Information about improving your lung health
- Supports for current smokers who are interested in quitting, and
- A chest CT scan for those found to be at very high risk for lung cancer.

About half of all people who call the program will not be found to be at very high risk for lung cancer. They will not benefit from a chest CT scan and will not be offered one.

5. How does the Lung Screening Program work?

If you have no worrying symptoms, are between 50 and 74 years old and have smoked daily for 20 years or more, please call the Lung Screening Program.

If you are in this age group and have stopped smoking but did smoke daily for 20 years or more, we also invite you to call the program. You can call the program toll-free at 1-833-505-LUNG (5864).

You may be asked to leave your name and phone number. A staff member will call you to book a telephone appointment with a nurse navigator. The nurse navigator is a specially trained nurse. She will ask you questions. Your answers will determine your personal level of risk for lung cancer. The nurse will explain the next best steps for you and answer your questions to help you make decisions.

All people who call will be offered information about improving their lung health.

About half of all people who call the program will not be found to be at very high risk for lung cancer. They will not benefit from a chest CT scan and will not be offered one.

Everyone who smokes will be offered information about stopping smoking if they want to quit. This is because smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer.

6. I am between 50 and 74 years old. I have never smoked, but I have breathed in a lot of second-hand smoke. Why can't I be screened?

Lung cancer is much more common in smokers than in non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke. People exposed to second-hand smoke get lung cancer, but it is less common. Screening with a CT scan has been shown to be useful in people who are at very high risk of lung cancer. There are risks with CT screening and most people will not benefit from a CT scan. Non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke will have all the risks of screening but less benefit.

7. Why is environmental risk not a reason for being screened?

Lung cancer screening with CT has been shown to be useful for people who are at very high risk of lung cancer because of smoking. There are risks with CT screening and most people will not benefit from a CT screening. We do not know if it is safe to screen people who are at risk because of environmental exposures. Research is being done in Nova Scotia and around the world to learn more about the environmental risks of lung cancer. When we know more about measuring these risks and how to screen people safely, the screening program may then include environmental risk as a reason for lung screening.

8. What can I do to lower their environmental risk for getting lung cancer?

You can lower your environmental risk of lung cancer by:

- Test your home for radon gas.
- Open windows and use fans to increase air flow; this will temporarily reduce the amount of radon in a home.
- To permanently reduce radon in a home, you can seal cracks in basement floors and foundations or pay a professional to reduce radon levels.
- More information is available at:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-risks-safety/radiation/radon.html>
- Avoid second-hand smoke.
- Test your drinking water for arsenic.

9. Is the lung screening program available across Nova Scotia?

For now, the Lung Screening Program is available in Central Zone. Central Zone communities include: Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford, Sackville, Eastern Shore and West Hants.

The Lung Screening Program will eventually be available across the province.

10. Who can contact the Lung Screening Program?

Right now, if you live in Central Zone and are between 50 and 74 years old, AND have smoked daily for at least 20 years, you are invited to call the program. If you have smoked daily for at least 20 years, but stopped smoking, you can also contact the program. You can call the Lung Screening Program at 1-833-505-LUNG (5864).

You will be offered information about lung cancer and ways to protect your lung health. A nurse navigator will ask you questions to determine your personal risk for lung cancer. If you are found to be at very high risk for lung cancer, you will be offered a chest CT scan. The nurse will talk with you about the benefits and risks of a chest CT scan. If you choose to have one, the nurse will book your appointment.

About half of all people who call the lung screening program will not be found to be at very high risk for lung cancer. This means they will not benefit from a chest CT scan and will not be offered one.

If you are a current smoker, you will be offered information and supports about quitting smoking. This is because smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer.

11. I am between 50 and 74 years old. I have been smoking for more than 20 years, but I don't live in Central Zone. Why is the Lung Screening Program not available across the province?

The Lung Screening Program is a new screening program. We are making it available one zone at a time so we can learn what works and what needs to change. The goal is to make the screening program as safe as it can be.

Lung screening is about looking for lung cancer before you have signs or symptoms.

If you are concerned about lung cancer and have warning signs or symptoms, you should talk to your health care provider about the right test for you. For information about signs and symptoms of lung cancer, please see question 3.

12. Why is smoking history so important?

Smoking is the number one risk factor for developing lung cancer. A person's risk for lung cancer increases with the number of cigarettes, cigars, and pipes smoked and the number of years smoked. It is never too late to benefit from quitting smoking. Stopping smoking at any age lowers a person's risk of developing lung cancer and many other cancers.

13. Why should I be screened for lung cancer?

If you are at very high risk for lung cancer, lung screening may find cancer early when treatment works best. Lung screening could save your life, but lung screening also has risks. If you are between 50 and 74 years old and have been smoking for 20 years or more, you should call the Lung Screening Program to see if lung screening is the right choice for you. A nurse navigator will ask your questions to determine your personal risk for lung cancer and whether lung cancer screening is right for you.

14. Does everyone who calls the nurse navigator get referred for a chest CT scan?

No, chest CT scans do not benefit everyone. There are risks with having a chest CT scan. Only people who are found to be at very high risk for lung cancer will get referred for a chest CT scan.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.