Patient & Family Guide

2026

Lung Screening Program Frequently Asked Questions

nova scotia health
Cancer Care Program
www.nscancercare.ca

Lung Screening Program

Frequently Asked Questions

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 or 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) or email at lungscreening@nshealth.ca**.

You will be asked to leave your name, date of birth, health card number, phone number, and an email address we can use to reach you. A member of the Lung Screening team will reach out to you and arrange the next steps. If a person's health care provider refers them, someone from the Lung Screening team will communicate with them the next steps.

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. Is the Lung Screening Program available across Nova Scotia?

For now, the Lung Screening Program is available in Central and Eastern Zones, which includes:

- Halifax
- Dartmouth
- Bedford
- Sackville
- Eastern Shore
- West Hants
- Cape Breton County
- Richmond County
- Inverness County
- Victoria County
- Guysborough County
- Antigonish County

The program will eventually be available across the province.

7. Who can contact the Lung Screening Program?

You can call the Lung Screening Program if you:

- Are between 50 and 74 years old
- Live in Central or Eastern Zones
- Do **not** have any symptoms of lung cancer
- Have smoked daily for 20 years or more at some point in your life, whether or not you still smoke

Phone (toll-free): **1-833-505-LUNG (5864)**

Email: lungscreening@nshealth.ca

You will be offered information about lung cancer and ways to protect your lung health. When a person contacts the Lung Screening Program directly, they are to leave a confidential message with their name, phone number, health card number, email and date of birth. A member of the Lung Screening team will reach out to them and arrange the next steps. If a person's health care provider refers them, someone from the lung screening team will communicate with them about the next steps.

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

If you smoke, we will offer you information and supports about stopping smoking. **Smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer.**

8. Why does the Lung Screening Program not screen after age 74?

- Lung cancer screening aims to find small lung cancers, often 10 years before warning signs or symptoms.
- Treatment for early lung cancer involves removing a part of a lung. Many people have pain and shortness of breath after this surgery. Treatment is more dangerous as we age and recovery takes longer. We always need to be careful that we are not doing more harm than good.
- The Canadian Task Force on Preventative Health Care recommends that people older than 74 do not undergo lung cancer screening. The reason is that for older people, the risks of screening may outweigh the benefits. As we learn more through research, our program will adjust.

Smoking is the number-one risk factor for lung cancer. It is never too late to benefit from quitting smoking. Ask your doctor for help to stop smoking or **call 811** from anywhere in Nova Scotia to reach Tobacco-Free Nova Scotia, our provincial quit line. **There is no cost to you for this service.** Speak with a certified smoking-cessation counsellor, get help with issues like cravings and withdrawal and, when you are ready, develop a quit plan that is right for you. You may also want to talk to a health care provider for more information.

9. I am between 50 and 74 years old and I have been smoking for more than 20 years, but I don't live in Central or Eastern 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 changes are needed. The goal is to make the screening program as safe as it can be.

Lung screening looks for cancer **before** you have signs and symptoms. If you have symptoms and you are concerned about lung cancer, talk with your primary health care provider. For information about signs and symptoms of lung cancer, please see question 3.

Smoking is the number-one risk factor for lung cancer. It is never too late to benefit from quitting smoking. Ask your doctor for help to stop smoking or **call 811** from anywhere in Nova Scotia to reach Tobacco-Free Nova Scotia, our provincial quit line. **There is no cost to you for this service.** Speak with a certified smoking-cessation counsellor, get help with issues like cravings and withdrawal and, when you are ready, develop a quit plan that is right for you.

10. Why is my smoking history so important?

Smoking is the number one risk factor for developing lung cancer. Your risk for lung cancer increases with the number of cigarettes, cigars, and pipes smoked and the number of years you have smoked.

It is never too late to benefit from stopping smoking. Stopping smoking at any age lowers your risk of developing lung cancer and many other cancers.

11. Other than smoking, what increases a person's risk for developing lung cancer?

- Being around second-hand smoke
- Radiation therapy to the chest
- Environmental risks (like being exposed to chemicals at work or radon gas in your home)
- Family history
- Age

There are also other risks that we are just learning about.

12. What is radon?

Radon is a radioactive gas that occurs naturally in the ground. You cannot see, smell, or taste it. Radon can get into buildings through cracks and holes. Over time, breathing in high levels of radon can cause lung cancer.

There are tests that can measure the amount of radon in your home. If a test shows high levels of radon:

- You can temporarily lower the amount by opening the windows as much as possible.
- There are companies that can do work to lower the levels.

13. How do I know if I've been exposed to radon?

The only way to know if you've been exposed to radon is to test your home for its presence. Visit https://novascotia.ca/nse/environmental-health/radon.asp for details.

14. Why are environmental risks not a reason for being screened?

Lung cancer screening with CT is useful for people who are at very high risk of lung cancer because of smoking.

There are risks with CT screening and we do not know if it is safe to screen people who are at risk because of environmental exposures. Most people will not benefit from a CT scan.

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, we may include environmental risks as a reason for lung screening.

15. Can I smoke while using NRT?

It is best not to smoke while using NRT. If you do, you may have symptoms caused by too much nicotine in your system like nausea, sweating, dizziness, shaking, confusion, weakness, a fast heartbeat, and feeling faint. If this happens, take the patch off, do not smoke or use the gum or lozenges, and get medical attention right away.

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

Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program
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