

Frequently Asked Questions-Lung Cancer Screening

1. What is Lung Cancer Screening?

Screening for cancer means testing for cancer before there are any symptoms. Screening for some cancers has reduced deaths by early detection and treatment. Now there is a test that can reduce death from lung cancer through early detection. The test is Low Dose CT scan (LDCT) of the lungs. The test is not recommended for everyone and it has risks as well as benefits. If you are eligible you will be encouraged to have annual screening.

2. Am I eligible for lung cancer screening?

If you are age 55-77 years of age

Asymptomatic (no signs or symptoms of lung cancer)

Current or former smoker who has quit in the last 15 years

Smoking history of at least 30 pack-year history (this means 1 pack per day for 30 years or 2 packs a day for 15 years, etc.)

3. Should I have a CT scan to screen for lung cancer?

If you are in the high-risk group described above you should talk to your doctor about lung cancer screening. Only Low Dose CT (LDCT) scans are recommended for screening. Chest x-rays are not recommended for lung cancer screening. For more information contact the Methodist Lung/Thoracic Oncology Clinic 402-354-5858.

4. Are there any risks involved with LDCT?

Risks associated with being screened include:

- False positives/additional testing: LDCT often finds something in the lung that could be cancer but is not. This is called a false positive. In order to make sure this is not cancer; your physician may order more tests. These tests can cause anxiety and on some occasions lead to invasive procedures such as biopsy to further determine whether a finding is a cancer.
- False negatives: No test is perfect; it is possible to have a medical condition including lung cancer that is not found during your exam.
- Radiation exposure: LDCT uses radiation to create images of your lungs. Radiation; can increase the risk of cancer. By using special techniques, the amount of radiation is the same as a mammogram.

Your physician has determined that the benefits of screening outweigh the risks of being exposed to the small amount of radiation from this scan.

- You should have your test at a hospital that has a team of experts who will clearly explain the procedure to you. They should tell you about the risks and benefits of screening, what the results mean and how they will follow-up with you after the initial screening.

5. How will I benefit from a low dose lung cancer screening CT?

The benefits of lung cancer screening CT scans are highest for those with significant lung cancer risk. You will find out if you have any suspicious findings for lung cancer.

6. What can I expect from the results?

You will be notified of your results within one week. It is very common to have lung nodules identified on your scan. Lung nodules are very small collections of tissue in the lung. The majority- more than 97% - are not cancer (benign). Most are normal lymph nodes or small areas of scarring from past infections. Less commonly, lung nodules are cancer. If a small lung nodule is found to be a cancer, studies show the cancer can be cured more than 80% of the time. This is why we are screening you. To determine if the nodule is benign or cancerous we may need to get more images before your next yearly screening exam. If the nodule is suspicious for cancer we will discuss this with your primary care physician and you may be referred to a specialist for further testing. Your primary care physician will receive a copy of the results and recommendations.

If you think you may qualify and wish to have a screening CT of the lungs, please call 402-354-5858 to schedule your test.

The best way to prevent lung cancer is to stop smoking. For help on quitting smoking, please call our “Quit Smart” phone line: 402-354-5237.