



For Immediate Release

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New guidelines provide smokers and former-smokers greater access to lung cancer screenings

The Prevent Cancer Foundation's "Back on the Books" campaign encourages those eligible for lung cancer screenings to set up appointments during Lung Cancer Awareness Month

Alexandria, Va. (Nov. 1, 2021) — November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month, and the [Prevent Cancer Foundation®](#) wants people to know that newly expanded access to lung cancer screenings could make them eligible for this potentially lifesaving test.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of all cancer deaths. According to 2021 estimates of the American Cancer Society, 235,760 people will be diagnosed with lung cancer this year and 131,880 will die of the disease. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer.

"The expansion of lung cancer screening criteria provides an opportunity to save even more lives by detecting lung cancer at earlier, more treatable stages," said Jody Hoyos, president and chief operating officer of the Prevent Cancer Foundation. "But it only works if people get screened. Lung cancer screening with a low-dose spiral CT scan takes about 10 minutes and is a critical tool in finding cancer early. That's why we are encouraging everyone who qualifies to schedule or reschedule their lung cancer screening appointments as soon as possible."

Prior to the pandemic, lung cancer screening rates were extremely low—a problem that has likely been compounded. A survey from Prevent Cancer Foundation noted nearly one-half of Americans who had a routine health appointment scheduled has missed, postponed and/or cancelled one or more of these appointments during the pandemic (equal to about one third of all Americans).

It's time to get lung cancer screening appointments—and all routine cancer screenings—back on the books.

Expanded access and early detection

In March 2021, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) released [new guidelines on lung cancer screening](#). The USPSTF's updated guidelines recommend lung cancer screenings for people ages 50-80 with a 20 pack-year history who currently smoke or have quit within the last 15 years. A "pack-year" is the equivalent of smoking one pack per day for a year.

Previously, the USPSTF recommended lung cancer screenings for ages 55-80 with a 30 pack-year history. By lowering the eligible screening age and smoking criteria, the USPSTF has **expanded screening access to millions more smokers and former smokers**.

Screening should be annual until the person being screened is out of the recommended age range or their health care provider recommends stopping.



Symptoms and risk factors

Since the pandemic began, lung cancer screening has had the added complication of overlapping symptoms with COVID-19 and overall reduced access to diagnostic technology, like CT scanners. These overlapping symptoms further support why **those at risk of developing lung cancer should schedule appointments with their doctors** to discuss their risk factors and any concerning symptoms.

Symptoms of lung cancer:

- Worsening or persistent cough
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Coughing up blood
- Fatigue
- Weight loss

Screening is important because it can lead to an earlier diagnosis, before symptoms begin, when successful treatment is more likely.

There are multiple risk factors for lung cancer, but smoking cigarettes is number one. **In the U.S., cigarette smoking is linked to about 90% of lung cancers.** People who smoke cigarettes are 15 to 30 times more likely to get lung cancer or die from lung cancer than people who do not smoke. Using other tobacco products such as cigars or pipes also increases the risk for lung cancer.

Other risk factors:

- Heavy exposure to secondhand smoke
- Exposure to arsenic, radon, asbestos, or certain other toxic substances
- Exposure to indoor or outdoor air pollution
- Personal or family history of lung cancer
- Job exposure to radiation
- Consumption of beta-carotene supplements by smokers
- [Arsenic in drinking water \(primarily from private wells\)](#)

Prevention can help. This includes not smoking, avoiding secondhand smoke, getting your home tested for radon and following recommended safety procedures in the workplace to minimize exposure to carcinogens.

Early detection saves lives. The Foundation's "Back on the Books" campaign encourages everyone who postponed or cancelled their routine cancer screenings due to the COVID-19 pandemic to get their appointments rescheduled as soon as possible. Routine cancer screening detects cancer early and increases the likelihood treatment will be successful.

The Prevent Cancer Foundation has long been an advocate for lung cancer screening. In 2000, the Foundation launched what is now called the [Quantitative Imaging Workshop](#). This led to the National Cancer Institute (NCI) undertaking the National Lung Cancer Screening Trial, which proves **that lung cancer screening of high-risk individuals can reduce lung cancer mortality by at least 20%.**



For more information about risk factors, symptoms, prevention and early detection, visit the [Prevent Cancer Foundation's webpage about lung cancer](#).

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About the Prevent Cancer Foundation®

The Prevent Cancer Foundation® is celebrating 35 years as the only U.S. nonprofit organization focused solely on saving lives across all populations through cancer prevention and early detection. Through research, education, outreach and advocacy, we have helped countless people avoid a cancer diagnosis or detect their cancer early enough to be successfully treated.

The Foundation is rising to meet the challenge of reducing cancer deaths by 40% by 2035. To achieve this, we are committed to investing \$20 million for innovative technologies to detect cancer early and advance multi-cancer screening, \$10 million to expand cancer screening and vaccination access to medically underserved communities, and \$10 million to educate the public about screening and vaccination options. For more information, please visit www.preventcancer.org.