



“I don’t smoke but someone in my house does. Can I get lung cancer?”

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Most lung cancer is caused by smoking, but sometimes lung cancer develops in people who have never smoked.

Smoking and lung cancer

Cigarette smoking is the number one cause of lung cancer. People who smoke cigarettes are 15 to 30 times more likely to get lung cancer than people who do not smoke. Lung cancer also can be caused by using other tobacco products such as pipes or cigars. People who inhale secondhand smoke are exposed to the same cancer-causing agents as smokers. Their risk of developing lung cancer is increased by up to 30 percent.

Other causes of lung cancer

Even if you don’t smoke cigarettes, or are not regularly exposed to secondhand smoke, there are other things that may cause lung cancer. Some harmful chemicals and substances that have been linked to lung cancer are colorless and odorless. Appropriate inspections and detection systems are essential to know if you’re being exposed to high amounts of these harmful chemicals and substances at work or at home. These cancer-causing agents include:

- Air pollution
- Radon gas
- Asbestos fibers
- Radiation exposure

Signs or symptoms

Most people with lung cancer don’t have symptoms until the cancer is advanced. Some symptoms and signs of lung cancer can also happen with other illnesses. If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor:

- Coughing that gets worse or doesn’t go away
- Coughing up blood or rust-colored spit or phlegm
- Chest pain that can get worse with deep breathing, coughing or laughing
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Infections like bronchitis and pneumonia that don’t go away or keep coming back

Keep your lungs healthy

- **Never start smoking, and if you do, stop.** After a person has quit smoking for 10 years, the risk of lung cancer can decrease up to 50 percent. Eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke.
- **Avoid occupational and indoor air pollutants.** Reduce or eliminate exposure to radon and other lung carcinogens. Get your home tested for radon. Be careful at work, and check health and safety guidelines.
- **Minimize exposure to outdoor air pollution.** Outdoor air pollutants come from utility companies, industrial operations and manufacturing processes, transportation vehicles, even long-term changes in our climate. These can all affect the air quality outside from day to day and make it unhealthy to breathe.
- **Prevent infections.** A cold or other respiratory infection can sometimes become very serious. Always wash your hands with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if you cannot wash. Get your annual flu vaccine, and stay home from work or school if you get sick.
- **Be physically active.** Whether you are young or old, able-bodied or living with a chronic illness or disability, being physically active can help keep your lungs healthy.
- **Get regular health care.** Regular check-ups can help prevent, catch and treat disease. Lung cancer screening is recommended for people age 55 and older who are or were heavy smokers. Speak with your doctor to see if lung cancer screening is right for you.

For more information about lung cancer, visit fallonhealth.org, click on Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links, and search "lung cancer".

Learn more about our tobacco treatment program, **Quit to Win:**

QuitToWin@fallonhealth.org

1-888-807-2908

Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

