nova scotia health

Cancer Care Program

2025

Understanding Your Lung Screening Results

This information is for people who have been booked for a lung screening CT scan or have already had a lung screening CT scan.

About lung screening CT scans:

- A lung screening CT scan of the lungs looks for lung nodules (or spots) on a person's lungs. These spots are small lumps of tissue that most people have. Sometimes the scan cannot tell whether the spots are small scars, areas of inflammation or cancer in your lungs. More testing is needed. Often, the best way to assess small spots is to watch them for any changes over time, just like you would for moles on the skin.
- A radiologist (a doctor who specializes in reading medical images) looks at your CT scan. They will decide what your next step should be, based on the size of the spots and what they look like.

What kind of follow-up tests might be needed?

Sometimes follow-up testing is needed after your first lung screening CT scan.
Follow-up may include having another lung screening CT, a different picture test of the lungs, a lung biopsy (a small sample of lung tissue is removed so it can be looked at more closely), surgery, or other tests. The screening program nurse will provide more information and answer any questions you may have.

Understanding your lung screening CT results

Your results will fall into one of four categories:

1. **Low risk and very low risk – no concerning findings**
   This means the radiologist did not notice anything of concern from your lung screening CT scan. Regular screening is still important.

   Next step: We will make an appointment for you to have another lung screening CT in 1 or 2 years. You always have a choice to continue or stop lung screening.

2. **More screening needed**
   This means the radiologist has noticed a spot that needs another test. These spots are commonly found on a person's lungs and have a low chance of being a cancer.

Next step: You will be booked for another scan. This will happen between 1 and 12 months after your first scan, depending on the size of the spot(s). The second scan will see if there have been any changes in size or how the spot(s) looks.

3. **More testing needed**
   This means the radiologist has noticed a spot that needs another test. This does not mean you have cancer. Another test is needed to know whether the spot is concerning.

   Next step: The program nurse will discuss your results and next steps with you. They will book the next test for you. The Lung Screening Program will facilitate the booking of recheck CT. Some patients may need a referral for consultation with a specialist in order to discuss more advanced testing.

4. **Findings not related to lung nodules**
   This means your lung scan found something that may need follow-up. This is called an incidental finding.

   Next step: The radiologist report will provide guidance on next steps. Your results will be shared with your family doctor or nurse practitioner. If you do not have a family doctor or nurse practitoner, the findings will be shared with the Lung Screening Program nurse. They will inform you that there are incidental findings that need follow-up and can coordinate referrals for you.

   The Lung Screening Program nurse does not have access to your full medical record to safely interpret the incidental findings and talk to you about them. We understand that this can be stressful, but discussing incidental findings is beyond the professional boundaries of the Lung Screening Program nurses. For this reason, you must talk to a doctor or nurse practitioner about your full report. These findings may be already known to you and your health care team. Please contact them for further discussion.

If at any time you have any worrying signs or symptoms, please reach out to your Primary Care Provider, emergency room, virtual care, or mobile health clinic.

For more information about lung cancer prevention and early detection in Nova Scotia:

- Call our toll-free cancer screening line at 1-833-505-LUNG (5864)
- Email lungscreening@nshealth.ca
- Find us online at www.nshealth.ca/lungscreening

Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program