

Cancer Screening

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Singapore. If cancer is detected early enough through screening, the person is able to receive treatment early and avoid complications, suffering and death.

Who should go for cancer screening?

It is best to get yourself screened if you have a family member who has been diagnosed with some form of cancer.

Your doctor will recommend the type of screening tests and frequency. If the results are abnormal, you may need more specific diagnostic tests to confirm if you have cancer.

Recommended Guidelines for Cancer Screening

- **Nasopharyngeal Carcinoma (NPC)**

It is the most common head and neck cancer, with 72.6% of cases affecting Chinese men between 40-65 years. Successful treatment depends on stage of cancer. However, early detection improves overall cure rate.

Screening

Blood tests can be conducted for the screening and diagnosis of NPC.

Should you be screened for NPC?

If you have two or more family members or relatives with NPC, an annual screening with the EBV IgA antibody test and nasoendoscopy is recommended.

- **Colorectal Cancer**

It is a cancer of the colon (large intestine) and rectum (the passage connecting the colon to the anus). It is the most common cancer among men and second most common cancer among women.

Most colorectal cancers begin as growths called colon polyps. If these polyps are detected early, they can be removed to prevent the cancer.

Screening

Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) Detects hidden blood in the stool which may be due to bleeding. Those with positive FOBT will go through colonoscopy to rule out cancer.

Colonoscopy A tube is used to examine the lining of the large intestine. It is the only test that detects and removes polyps found.

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy - A tube is inserted into the rectum and guided into the sigmoid colon to examine the lining of the lower end of the large intestine.

Computed Tomographic Colonography X-ray equipment creates images of the colon and rectum. Although the test is minimally invasive, it exposes one to radiation.

Should you be screened for colorectal cancer?

You are at high risk if one or more of your relatives are diagnosed with the cancer or polyps in their colon. Women who have had cancer of the womb, ovaries or breast may also have a higher risk of colorectal cancer.

Even if you have no symptoms and are not considered high risk, go for annual screening from 50 years of age

If you are at high risk, a colonoscopy at a younger age and at more frequent intervals may be needed. Consult your doctor for advice.

- **Lung Cancer**

It is the leading cause of cancer deaths among men in Singapore. Although a history of smoking is the main known risk factor, the number of cases occurring in people who have never smoked is increasing. Quitting smoking reduces the risk of lung cancer, although it does not totally eliminate the risk.

Screening

No proven screening test. Individuals at risk may consider a CT scan after knowing the limitations and risks of the procedure.

Should you be screened for lung cancer?

Individuals at risk include current and ex-smokers. Screening for these individuals may help early detection.

- **Liver Cancer**

The main risk factors for developing liver cancer are:

Chronic hepatitis B infection

Hepatitis C liver cirrhosis

Liver cirrhosis from other causes

Patients with a chronic hepatitis B infection may eventually become seriously ill with, or may die from, liver disease and/or cancer.

Hence screening for hepatitis B infection is recommended for:

Pregnant women

Healthcare workers

Dialysis patients

Those with a history of hepatitis B infection or liver cancer in the family

Those with high-risk behaviour. This includes having unprotected sex, having multiple partners, having a sex partner with hepatitis B and drug addicts who share injection needles.

Screening

A blood test for serum alpha feto-protein level should be done every three to six months, as those with hepatitis and liver cancer have raised levels of these. Ultrasound of the liver should be done every six to twelve months.

Should you be screened for liver cancer?

Those with chronic hepatitis B infection and liver cirrhosis due to hepatitis C are at risk and should be screened. There is no need to screen for liver cancer if you are not at risk.

- **Breast Cancer**

The peak incidence occurs in women in the age group 55-59 years. Women are said to be at high risk if they have:

A family history of breast cancer in several close members of the family

A close relative diagnosed under the age of 40

A history of other cancers, especially cancer of the ovary and colon, in members of the same family

Screening

Monthly breast self-examination is recommended for women from the age of 30. Regular mammography is the most reliable way to detect breast cancer, even before lumps are felt.

Should you be screened for breast cancer?

Early screening for breast cancer can detect cancer in its early stage for effective treatment. Women at high risk should consult their doctors regarding the frequency of the screening.

Below are the recommended screening guidelines for healthy women:

Between 50 69 years: Go for a mammography once every two years

Between 40 49 years: Discuss with your doctor about the benefits, limitations and harms of mammography. If you decide to do it, have it done every year.

Under 40 years: No need for a mammography

- **Uterine Cancer**

Uterine cancer is the cancer of the womb. Women with this cancer tend to show symptoms at an early stage, so they should report abnormal symptoms, such as any unexpected vaginal bleeding or spotting, to their doctors.

Screening

There is no standard screening test. A vaginal ultrasound and biopsy of the inner lining of the uterus are commonly done for early detection of uterine cancer.

Should you be screened for uterine cancer?

Yearly screening is recommended if you are at risk, i.e. if you have three or more relatives with cancer of the bowel, womb or urinary system.

Consult a doctor if you experience suspicious persistent symptoms, such as abnormal vaginal bleeding.

- **Ovarian Cancer**

A cancer of the ovaries in a woman. Early ovarian cancer may not cause any obvious symptoms and may go undetected.

Screening

Annual pelvic examination and vaginal ultrasound, with or without blood test for tumour marker (CA 125), is recommended for women who are at high risk of ovarian cancer.

Should you be screened for ovarian cancer?

A genetic risk assessment and yearly screening are recommended if you are at increased risk, i.e. you have two or more first-degree relatives (mother, sister or daughter) with ovarian cancer.

Consult your doctor if you experience any suspicious persistent symptoms, such as:

Abdominal bloating

Abdominal or pelvic pain

Constipation

Urinary problems

Unexplained weight loss

- **Cervical Cancer**

It refers to the cancer of the cervix (neck of the womb). It can be prevented if abnormal cell changes are detected and treated early through regular screening.

You are at a high risk of cervical cancer if you:

Had sexual intercourse at an early age

Have multiple sex partners

Have a history of sexually transmitted diseases

Are infected with certain high-risk strains of Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

Have a weakened immune system (e.g. HIV infection)

Are a long-term user of combined birth control pills

Are a chronic smoker

Screening

It involves a Pap smear test. The Pap smear is a simple procedure where the doctor obtains some scrapings from the cervix to detect abnormal cell changes. Early detection through screening increases the effectiveness of the treatment.

Should you be screened for cervical cancer?

If you've never had sexual intercourse, you do not need a Pap smear test. But if you experience abnormal vaginal discharge, you should consult your doctor.

If you are between 25 and 69 years and have ever had sexual intercourse, you should go for a Pap smear once every three years. You can stop taking the test at 69 if your Pap smear taken at 69 and in the past have been clear.

If you are HIV positive, you should go for a Pap smear test every year.

Even if you have had HPV vaccination, you should go for regular Pap smear screening once every three years.

- **Prostate Cancer**

It is seldom seen in men less than 50 years of age. Prostate cancers range from slow-growing to aggressive cancers. Slow-growing cancers are common and may not cause symptoms or shorten life.

Screening

Digital Rectal Examination (DRE) is a quick and reliable examination of the prostate gland with a gloved finger through the rectum. DRE can pick up suspicious lumps in the prostate gland.

A blood test can detect raised levels of Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA), which may be an early indication of prostate cancer. However, raised levels of PSA may be due to non-cancerous prostate enlargement or inflammation of the prostate.

Biopsy of the prostate should be done if DRE and PSA levels are abnormal

Should you be screened for prostate cancer?

Go for a screening if you are male, above 50 years of age and have a family history of prostate cancer diagnosed below 60 years of age. Consult your doctor regarding the benefits and risks of screening.