Cancer Screening Programs in British Columbia (BC)

Why is cancer screening important?
Cancer screening can help find cancer in your body before you have any symptoms. Finding cancer early on, before it has a chance to grow and spread, can improve your chances for effective treatment and recovery.

BC Cancer offers free screening programs for breast, cervical, colon and lung cancer. Screening tests are offered at regular intervals for specific age groups. Regular screening is important. If you have known risk factors or a family history of cancer, you may be encouraged to be screened earlier, more often or with a different test.

First Nations people in BC have higher than average rates of cervical and colon cancer and their rates of lung cancer are increasing. Finding cancer early through screening can increase the chances of successful treatment.

Honour yourself, your family, your community and your ancestors and make cancer screening a part of your wellness – for you and the ones you love.
What types of cancer screening are available?

BC Cancer offers screening programs for breast, cervical, colon and lung cancer. See below to find out if you are eligible for these screening tests and how to access these services.

If you live in an area that requires travel to access screening services or a lab, transportation and accommodation coverage may be available to you with documentation of appointment or a health care provider's referral. Check with your benefits provider or call First Nations Health Benefits at 1-855-550-5454.

Breast cancer screening = A mammogram (an X-ray of your breasts)
- BC Cancer provides mammograms to BC women who are 40 and older.
- The program operates out of 35+ clinics across the province. BC Cancer also operates mobile digital mammography vehicles that travel to rural and remote communities to provide screening.
- You should have a mammogram every two years. If you have a family history of breast cancer or known risk factors, you may need to be screened every year.
- You do not need a referral from a health care provider to be screened and you can book an appointment for yourself by calling 1-800-663-9203.
- If you have previously had a mammogram, BC Cancer will send you a reminder letter to book your next appointment. You can book your appointment online using the code included in the reminder letter.

Cervical cancer screening = A Pap test (a swab of your cervix)
- A Pap test is free and recommended for women and people with cervixes, including transgender individuals, who are between the ages of 25 and 69.
- The test doesn't take very long and can be done by a doctor, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, midwife or naturopathic doctor at their office or clinic.
- You should have a Pap test every three years.
- You can book a Pap test appointment with your health care provider or at a walk-in clinic.
- Options for Sexual Health has over 60 clinics in BC where you can get a Pap test. Call 1-800-739-7367 for more information.

Colon cancer screening = A fecal immunochemical test (FIT) (a test of your stool)
- A FIT looks for blood in a sample of your stool, which can be a sign of pre-cancer.
- People between the ages of 50 and 74 should have a FIT done every two years.
- If you have a family history of colon cancer or known risk factors, you may need a colonoscopy (a different kind of test) every three to five years. Talk to your health care provider to find out if this applies to you.
- You can do the FIT yourself in the privacy of your home and bring the stool sample back to the lab.
- Ask your health care provider to give you a FIT form that you can take to a lab to pick up your test kit. If you cannot find a lab in your community, call 1-877-70-COLON.
Lung cancer screening = Low dose CT lung scan (a picture of your lungs)

- A CT lung scan is free and is available to people between the ages of 55 and 74 who are currently smoking or have smoked in the past and have a history of smoking of 20 years or more.
- A CT lung scan is done at a hospital.
- To find out if you are eligible for a CT lung scan, call 1-877-717-5864 to talk to a member of the BC Lung Screening Program. They will assess your lung cancer risk over the phone and let you know if you are eligible for screening. If you have a higher chance of getting lung cancer, you may be asked to have low dose x-ray pictures taken of your lungs instead of a CT lung scan.

Feeling safe
Making and going to a cancer screening appointment are important actions for your overall health and wellness. It is normal to experience a range of thoughts and feelings about screening.

When preparing for your cancer screening appointment, you may want to:

- Talk to a trusted health care provider before your appointment to ask them any questions you may have.
- Prepare for the appointment by using cultural or traditional health practices, like smudging, brushing or participating in ceremony.
- Connect with a trusted Elder or cultural wellness provider.
- Bring a friend or family member to your appointment.
- Practice relaxation or breathing exercises.
- Ask a second staff member to be in the room with you.
- Plan a celebration for, and after, your appointment.
Supports for you
Talk with your health care provider about cancer screening. You may need to be screened earlier, more often or with a different test if you have a family history of cancer or have known risk factors. Your health care provider can let you know what kind of screening you need and how often you should be screened.

If you do not have a trusted health care provider, consider calling the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program or 811.

Remember that you can share any concerns or report a health care harm about unsafe care to FNHA’s Quality Care & Safety Office (see contact information below).

Resources
- First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day: 1-855-344-3800 (if you don't have access to a doctor)
- FNHA’s Quality Care & Safety Office: 1-844-935-1044 or email quality@fnha.ca
- BC Cancer Screening: bccancer.bc.ca/screening
- FNHA Cancer Information and Resources: fnha.ca/cancer