



# Think Lung Cancer

Early detection significantly improves survival from lung cancer

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Ireland. Early diagnosis is crucial.

If lung cancer is diagnosed at an early stage there is a 51% chance of 5 year survival compared to 4% if diagnosed at late stage.<sup>1</sup>

## Be Vigilant, Think Lung

Early symptoms of lung cancer can be vague. Be vigilant for your patient who is at high-risk of lung cancer.



### Think Lung

You can help. Assure someone their health matters and talk about any concerns they may have about symptoms that are not normal for them. Think L.U.N.G.

- L**isten to a person's concerns. Symptoms that they 'play down' as small or unimportant may in fact be symptoms of lung cancer.
- U**nderstand that a person may feel ashamed that they smoke and may be too embarrassed to talk about breathing symptoms.
- N**ote symptoms that are not normal for someone.
- G**ive a person encouragement to re contact their GP if symptoms persist after a first GP visit. It's important to validate health-seeking behaviour, especially in people at increased risk of cancer.



### Detect Lung Cancer early

While anybody can develop lung cancer some people are more at risk. Signs of lung cancer can be spotted. Watch out for the person who is at increased risk and shows potential early signs.

#### Signs of lung cancer

- C**onstant or changing cough, clubbing
- A**ppetite loss/weight loss
- N**ew cough
- C**hest or shoulder pain
- E**asily breathless
- R**eally tired, raised platelets

#### Who is at risk

- Male and female. Older, aged 50+ years
- Smoker, ex-smoker or exposed to smoke
- Socio-economically deprived
- Radiation exposure, for example living in area with high radon

Encourage someone to ring their GP if they are worried about any symptom which is unusual for them.



## Background

The National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and partners want to improve outcomes for people diagnosed with lung cancer by working with the public, community organisations and healthcare professionals.

GPs and practice nurses have a role as a profession that their patients trust. Identifying the high risk patient, potential early signs and validating your patient's decision to seek help for their symptoms increases the potential for lung cancer to be caught at an early stage.

## The impact of Covid-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 was followed by a dramatic reduction in the number of electronic referrals by GPs to Rapid Access Lung Clinics. This sharp reduction in e-referrals raises concerns that patients with symptoms suspicious for lung cancer are deferring telephoning their GPs, resulting in a delay in diagnosis. It is vital that people with potential symptoms of lung cancer do not have their diagnosis delayed because of fears around COVID-19.

## What we know

A National Survey on Lung Cancer Awareness, together with focus groups, undertaken amongst those at high risk of lung cancer living in Ireland has shown the following:

- Knowledge of risk factors and signs and symptoms of lung cancer is high amongst high-risk individuals
- A significant proportion of people at higher risk of lung cancer do not feel confident that they would notice signs and symptoms of lung cancer in themselves
- Smokers feel a strong sense of shame and fatalism around cancer
- The commonest reason for reluctance to see a doctor is 'fear of what the doctor might find'.

90% of cases of lung cancer are symptomatic at diagnosis, with cough being the commonest symptom. Smokers in particular may feel embarrassed to speak to their GP about what they feel are 'trivial' symptoms.

**Tailored lung cancer online education sessions or material for staff publications can be provided.**

**Please contact [prevention@cancercontrol.ie](mailto:prevention@cancercontrol.ie) with your request.**

Over the coming months, public awareness campaigns will be run by the NCCP and partners, to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of lung cancer.

## Resources

- [Referral guidelines for RALCs](#)
- [Slide for staff education](#)
- [Infographic](#)