Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, causing more deaths than breast, prostate, and colorectal cancers combined. It is estimated that over 80 percent of lung cancers could be cured if detected at an early stage.

What is screening?
Screening is looking for cancer before symptoms occur. This is helpful in finding cancer at an early stage. When abnormal tissue or cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat. If a screening test is abnormal, more tests may be done to find out if a person indeed has cancer.

Low-dose lung CT scans may be recommended as a screening test for lung cancer. A low-dose lung CT scan examines the structures inside the chest using X-ray transmissions that are converted to detailed images.
**Why is screening done for lung cancer?**

Lung cancer is often not detected until it is advanced and a cure is no longer possible. The only way to detect lung cancer in its earliest stages is through the use of a low-dose CT scan. Clinical trials have shown the likelihood of surviving lung cancer is improved with screening. Thus, it is recommended that people who are at high risk receive this screening.

**Who should be screened for lung cancer?**

Lung screening is recommended for individuals who:
- Are between ages 55 and 74*
- Are still smoking or quit smoking within the past 15 years
- Have a 30-pack year or more history of smoking.

A pack year is calculated by multiplying the number of packs smoked per day by the number of years an individual has smoked. For example, someone who smokes 1½ packs a day for 20 years would have a 30-pack year smoking history.

*Insurance coverage varies. Tricare now covers screening for ages 55-80.

**How is payment for a lung screening handled?**

Most insurance companies cover the cost of this screening as it is now considered a preventative medicine for individuals meeting our screening criteria. We will also check with your insurance company for approval prior to your screening. You may qualify for a free screening if you are uninsured or underinsured, with support from a grant from the Whedon Foundation. To find out if you qualify, call 406-238-LUNG (5864).

**How is a low-dose lung CT scan done?**

Individuals undergoing a low-dose lung CT scan will lie on a narrow table. They will hold their breath briefly as the table passes through the center of an open ring that rotates around during the test. As this ring rotates, high resolution cross-sectional images of the lungs are captured. The procedure does not use contrast dye, so it is non-invasive, painless, and typically takes less than a couple minutes.

**Is there exposure to radiation with a low-dose lung CT scan?**

Because X-rays are involved with a CT scan, there is some exposure to radiation with a lung CT scan. However, the benefits of an accurate and early diagnosis of lung cancer far outweigh the risk.

**What are the next steps after a low-dose lung CT scan?**

A letter will be mailed with general information regarding the CT scan results within a few days of the procedure and indicate if additional diagnostic follow-up is needed for any abnormalities. The primary care doctor will also receive a full report. If additional testing is needed, or there are positive results, a patient care navigator will assist with scheduling these.

**How can the risk of lung cancer be reduced?**

The best way to reduce the risk of lung cancer is to quit smoking. Billings Clinic offers smoking cessation counseling to our patients who undergo lung cancer screening. For a smoking cessation appointment, please call 406-238-LUNG (5864).