



CAYMAN  
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CANCER  
SOCIETY

# Lung & Respiratory Tract Cancers

## WHAT ARE RESPIRATORY TRACT CANCERS?

**R**espiratory tract cancers are a common family of cancers that begin in the cells of the respiratory system – your windpipe (trachea), bronchi (airways), and lung tissues. Your windpipe connects your nose and mouth to your lungs, where it splits into two bronchi, which in turn carry air into your lungs.

**Lung cancer** affects the cells and tissues in your lungs. There are two main types of lung cancer: non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and small cell lung cancer (SCLC).

**Bronchial cancer** starts in the mucous glands and ducts of the lungs, airways, windpipe, and salivary glands, and can spread to other parts of the body.

**Tracheal cancer** is a rare cancer that starts in the windpipe.

## LUNG CANCER FACTS

- Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020, or nearly one in six deaths. Lung cancers accounted for an estimated 2.21 million new cases and 1.8 million deaths worldwide.
- As many as 30-50% of cancers can be prevented by avoiding risk factors and implementing existing evidence-based prevention strategies.
- Many cancers have a high chance of cure if diagnosed early and treated appropriately.
- Smoking tobacco is the biggest preventable cause of cancer worldwide.
- Lung cancer is more common among men and people of African descent. Terminal lung cancer is more common in middle-aged to older adults.

**Many cancers can be cured if detected early and treated effectively.**

## EARLY DETECTION AND DIAGNOSIS

Dr. Sidney Ebanks, a GP and primary care doctor at Doctors Hospital, has a particular interest in chest and respiratory diseases. He advises that, as with many cancers, early-stage lung cancer may show no signs or symptoms, so early detection is critical.

Dr. Ebanks recommends lung cancer screenings, especially for those in high-risk categories, such as smokers. These screenings use low-dose CT scans to obtain a clear image of the lungs with reduced radiation exposure. CT scans are an effective way to

diagnose the disease early, allowing for treatment before cancer spreads. A delayed diagnosis may mean that the cancer is much harder to treat.

Lung cancers, like other forms of cancer, can be caused by both external factors and internal factors – or a combination of both.

## LEADING RISK FACTORS FOR RESPIRATORY CANCERS

### External risk factors

- Smoking
- Secondhand smoke (passive smoking)
- Environmental risk factors (including radiation, workplace hazards, and air pollution)

### Internal risk factors

- Family history genetics (including sex and race)
- Previous radiation therapies

**Smoking tobacco is the single most common risk factor for respiratory tract cancers.**

**Quitting smoking and decreasing exposure to environmental risk factors can help decrease your risk for lung cancer.**

Regular cancer screenings, including X-rays and CT scans of the lungs, can help identify these respiratory cancers early and provide the best outcomes.

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of respiratory tract cancers are often linked to breathing. They can include:

- A new cough that doesn't go away and/or gets worse
- Coughing up blood, even a small amount
- Hoarseness or other changes to your voice
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing or noisy breathing
- Chest pain (may be persistent or get worse with deep breathing or coughing)
- Frequent chest infections (e.g. pneumonia)

Some symptoms, such as coughing (often with blood), chest pain, wheezing, and weight loss, are more common in advanced stages of lung cancer. Consult with your healthcare provider for assessment if you have any symptoms of respiratory cancers.

## OTHER SYMPTOMS CAN INCLUDE:

### Lung cancer

- Recurring fevers
- Bone pain
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck or above the collarbone
- Unexplained weight loss

### Bronchial cancer

- Flushing of the face
- A lump under the tongue or the roof of the mouth
- Difficulty swallowing
- Numbness of jaw, the roof of the mouth, tongue, or face
- A bump in front of the ear or under the jaw
- Swelling of glands near your ear, lower jaw, or mouth

### Tracheal cancer

- Difficulty swallowing
- Chills

## TREATMENTS

There are a variety of treatment options for lung cancer. Depending on the specific diagnosis (SCLC vs. NSCLC, location of tumour(s), etc.) and other factors, your doctor will recommend a course of treatment designed for you. Common treatment options include:

- Surgery to remove tumours
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Ablation

In advanced cases, your doctor may focus instead on treating symptoms and providing palliative care to keep you comfortable.

Contact the DH Care Centre at (345) 949-6066 or [DHcarecentre@doctorshospitalcayman.com](mailto:DHcarecentre@doctorshospitalcayman.com) to book your respiratory cancer screening today.