

Cancer Screening Guidelines

Regular screening can detect several types of cancer at a more treatable stage.

June 9, 2025 By [Liz Highleyman](#)

Cancer is often difficult to treat at advanced stages, but some malignancies can be detected early with regular screening. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), the American Cancer Society (ACS) and professional organizations update screening guidelines based on the latest research.

Breast cancer: A mammogram (low-dose X-ray) is the primary method of breast cancer screening. The USPSTF recommends screening mammograms every two years for women ages 40 to 74 at average risk. Those at higher risk may benefit from more frequent screening.

Cervical, anal and oral cancer: These cancers are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection. Screenings for cervical and anal cancer include Pap tests and testing for high-risk HPV types. The USPSTF recommends cervical cancer screening starting at age 20. Routine anal cancer screening is not recommended for the general population, but gay men and people living with HIV are at higher risk. Dentists look for signs of oral cancer during routine dental care.

Colon and rectal cancer: The USPSTF recommends colorectal cancer screening for adults ages 45 to 75 at average risk. People at increased risk may benefit from earlier screening. Options include a colonoscopy every 10 years, flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years or stool tests every year. A colonoscopy uses a flexible lighted tube to view the entire colon, while a sigmoidoscopy views the lower section. Stool tests look for blood or abnormal DNA in a sample collected at home.

Liver cancer: Chronic hepatitis B or C, heavy alcohol use and fatty liver disease can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer. While screening is not recommended for the general population, the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases recommends semiannual monitoring using ultrasound scans and alfa-fetoprotein blood tests for people with cirrhosis.

Lung cancer: Screening for lung cancer involves low-dose CT imaging of the chest. Screening is not

recommended for the general population at average risk. The USPSTF recommends annual scans for people ages 50 to 80 with a 20-pack-year smoking history who either currently smoke or have quit within the past 15 years. The ACS calls for screening people in this age group regardless of how long ago they quit.

Prostate cancer: Screening with prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood tests can detect aggressive prostate cancer early, but routine testing can also find slow- growing malignancies that would never become life-threatening. According to the USPSTF, men ages 55 to 69 should make an individual decision about PSA testing with their health care provider. The ACS recommends that men at average risk should discuss PSA screening starting at age 50, or as soon as age 40 for those at higher risk.

Skin cancer: Visual examination of the skin can detect abnormal growths that might be cancerous. Look for moles that are large, have an irregular shape or unusual colors or have changed in size or appearance.

These recommendations are for preventive screening for people at average risk who currently have no signs or symptoms of cancer. Contact your doctor if you notice an unusual lump, abnormal appearance or change in function anywhere in the body or have symptoms such as prolonged fatigue, unexplained weight loss or pain without a known cause.