I have smoked for many years. Should I get screened for lung cancer?

February 3, 2020 By Liz Highleyman

Lung cancer screening using low-dose CT scans can detect cancer early, when it is easier to treat. The National Lung Screening Trial, which enrolled more than 53,000 current and former heavy smokers, found that those who received annual scans had a lower risk of dying from lung cancer. But a recent study found that less than 2% of eligible people receive the recommended tests.

The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends yearly lung cancer screening for people ages 55 to 80 who have a total smoking history of 30 pack-years or more and either still smoke or have quit within the past 15 years. This means, for example, smoking one pack of cigarettes a day for 30 years or two packs a day for 15 years.

UPDATE 8/17/20: The task force is in the process of revising its guidelines to lower the screening starting age to 50 and the pack-year threshold to 20.

Recent research suggests that people living with HIV may develop lung cancer at younger ages and therefore may benefit from starting screening sooner.

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