

RAO Newsletter #2023-4: Don't Delay Your TRICARE Covered Cancer Screenings

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – If you had cancer, you'd probably want to know as soon as possible. That's because when it comes to cancer, time is critical. Generally, the earlier a cancer is found, the easier it may be to treat or cure. Some types of cancer can be detected before a person even shows symptoms. TRICARE covers screenings for these cancers as part of your [preventive care benefit](#).

“Getting your recommended cancer screenings is vital to your health and longevity,” said Jeannine Pickrell, RN, Disease Management & Population Health, TRICARE Health Plan, Defense Health Agency. “If you've been putting off a cancer screening for months or even years, it's time to make it a priority.”

You can get some cancer screenings during your next [Health Promotion and Disease Prevention \(HP&DP\) exam](#), which makes prioritizing cancer screenings and other preventive services more convenient. And as outlined in the [TRICARE Costs and Fees Fact Sheet](#), you'll have no out-of-pocket costs for [getting preventive care](#) when you follow your plan's rules.

Your age, your sex, and if you have certain risk factors determine which cancers you should be screened for and how often you should be screened for them. Read on to learn which cancer screenings are appropriate for you.

1. Breast Cancer

TRICARE covers clinical [breast exams](#) during a covered [HP&DP exam](#). TRICARE also covers [mammograms](#) every 12 months for women who are:

Age 40 or older

Age 30 or older with a 15% or greater lifetime risk of developing breast cancer

For women age 30 or older with a 20% or greater lifetime risk of developing breast cancer, TRICARE covers annual [breast MRI screening](#) in addition to annual mammograms.

2. Cervical Cancer

TRICARE covers [Pap tests](#) (also called Pap smears) for women starting at age 21. Generally, you should get a Pap test at least once every three years. Your provider may recommend that you get Pap tests more frequently.

If you're age 30 or older, TRICARE also covers [HPV DNA testing](#) when done in conjunction with a Pap test.

3. Colorectal Cancer

If you're age 45 or older with [average risk](#) for colon cancer, TRICARE covers several different types of [screenings for colorectal cancer](#). Ask your provider about which screenings are appropriate for you.

4. Lung Cancer

Do you have a history of smoking? TRICARE covers [lung cancer screening](#) if you:

Are 50 to 80 years old

Have a [20 pack per year](#) or more history of smoking

Currently smoke or have quit smoking within the past 15 years

5. Oral Cavity and Pharyngeal Cancers

TRICARE covers a complete [oral cavity examination](#) as part of routine preventive care if you're an adult at high risk due to exposure to tobacco or excessive amounts of alcohol.

6. Prostate Cancer

TRICARE covers annual [prostate cancer exams](#) for men. Your coverage depends on your age and other factors. Typically, TRICARE covers your testing if you're age 50 or older with at least a 10-year life expectancy. However, you may be eligible for prostate cancer exams starting at age 40 or age 45 if you have certain [risk factors](#) (family history, race).

7. Skin Cancer

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [skin cancer](#) is the most common form of cancer in the U.S. TRICARE covers [skin cancer exams](#) if you:

Have a family or personal history of skin cancer

Have increased occupational or recreational exposure to sunlight

Show clinical evidence of precursor lesions

Precursor lesions are abnormal areas of your skin that could turn into cancer. Talk to your provider if you notice any [changes in your skin](#), including a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in a mole, or if you have concerns about your exposure to sunlight.

8. Testicular Cancer

Are you a male age 13 through 39? TRICARE covers [testicular cancer exams](#) annually if you have a history of cryptorchidism, orchiopexy, or testicular atrophy.

9. Thyroid Cancer

TRICARE covers [thyroid cancer physical exams](#) for adults with a history of upper body exposure to radiation.

Because clinical recommendations for cancer screenings can change over time, talk to your provider about which screenings are right for you. And remember, these screenings are meant to detect cancer *before* symptoms appear. If you show signs or symptoms of any of type of cancer, visit your provider as soon as possible. Visit the [CDC](#) and the [National Cancer Institute](#) websites to learn more.