

Script – Print - The Trouble with Radon

January is National Radon Awareness Month

Radon isn't something that's often talked about. But it's potentially dangerous if left undetected, and it's worse if you're a smoker. January is Radon Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness and educate the public.

"Radon is a radioactive gas and it forms from the decay of certain elements in the ground," said Dr. Iftexhar Ahmad, Radiation Oncologist, OSF HealthCare. "It's a naturally occurring phenomenon and that's where it comes from. Where it becomes dangerous is – radon itself once it's created – actually quickly decays and when it decays the particles that form when inhaled over time can cause issues with the lungs."

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Surgeon General's office radon is responsible for more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths each year. Radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking.

Dr. Ahmad says when you breathe in radon, radioactive particles from radon gas can get caught in your lungs. Over time, the radioactive particles increase the chance of lung cancer. In fact, it may take years before any symptoms appear.

"It's a matter of being aware of your environment," said Dr. Iftexhar Ahmad, Radiation Oncologist, OSF HealthCare. "If you're somebody who works in closed areas, especially basement areas where there's not a lot of good ventilation, especially in older buildings, older homes there may be a radon issue. The thing about radon is its colorless, you can't smell it and you just don't know that it's there and the longer you spend in an environment like that the higher the chances you have of getting lung cancer from it."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the chances of getting lung cancer depend mostly on the following:

- How much radon is in your home
- The amount of time you spend in your home
- Whether you are a smoker or have ever smoked
- Whether you burn wood, coal, or other substances that add particles to indoor air

"There is no blood test, no x-ray that somebody can do to know they have an ailment that is caused by radon," said Dr. Iftexhar Ahmad, Radiation Oncologist, OSF HealthCare. "We just know there is a correlation between lung cancers, but in general, lung issues. The key is if you are in an environment and you find out down the line there were high levels of radon, or you're not sure but you suspect, you want to be more vigilant about your breathing and your lung health."

These days, the best way to determine whether your home has high levels of radon is to have it tested. You can hire a professional or do it yourself with a radon test kit. Other ways to reduce levels of radon in your home is to discourage smoking in your home; increase air flow by opening windows and using fans and vents to circulate air and seals cracks in floors and walls with plaster and caulk.

While radon is not usually on most people's list of concerns, Dr. Ahmad says it's important to be educated and mindful about the potential dangers of radon.

"Being aware that it's out there with a relatively simple test you can do, many times yourself," said Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, Radiation Oncologist, OSF HealthCare. "Just to make sure for peace of mind, 'let me be sure my home is a safe environment.'"

For more information about lung cancer and radon, please visit [OSF HealthCare](#).