

# Know the risks

# Take charge of your health

# FIREFIGHTERS & CANCER

## GENERAL PUBLIC

Cancer is the leading cause of death



2 out of 5 people will get cancer



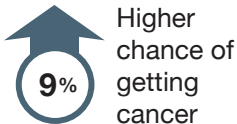
1 out of 4 people will die of cancer

Chance of getting cancer:

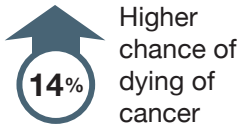


## FIREFIGHTERS

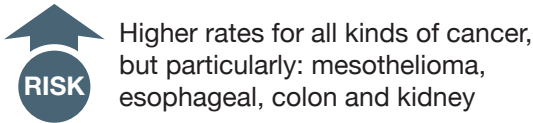
Same risk as general public, PLUS:



Higher chance of getting cancer



Higher chance of dying of cancer



Higher rates for all kinds of cancer, but particularly: mesothelioma, esophageal, colon and kidney

In Canada, 45% of men and 41% of women will battle cancer in their lifetime. If you are a firefighter, your chances are 9% higher.

Biggest occupational cancer risks for firefighters:

1. Toxins in the smoke, soot and tar from synthetic building materials – inhaled, swallowed, or absorbed through skin
2. Diesel exhaust fumes – inhaled

Firefighters also tend to have a high incidence of these other risk factors:

- Tobacco / smokeless tobacco use
- Obesity
- Poor diet
- Alcohol use
- Lack of exercise
- Poor sleep patterns

**Although your chosen career increases your chances of getting cancer, there is a lot you can do to reduce your risk.**

**See inside this brochure for details.**



**What you can do to reduce the risk**



## What you can do in your life

Lifestyle changes have the biggest effect on your risk.

### Most important things you can do

1. Don't smoke.
2. Exercise regularly.

### What else you can do

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat healthy food – more fruits and vegetables, less refined sugars and junk food.
- Avoid heavy and binge drinking.
- Get enough sleep.
- Find healthy ways to reduce stress.

### Medical screening

Cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence, if it's caught early enough.

- Start medical screening for cancer **10 years** earlier than the general population, or **10 years** earlier than the youngest case of cancer in your immediate family (whichever is younger).
- Establish an annual health maintenance program that includes baseline cancer screening and surveillance.
- Ensure your family doctor is aware of the cancer risks to firefighters.

**Don't be embarrassed to advocate for your own health. See resources at right for help with early screening.**

## What you can do at work

**Don't take shortcuts** – these safety procedures protect you, your colleagues, and your family.

### Most important things you can do

1. Use SCBA from initial attack to end of the decon process.
2. Wear your PPE and SCBA properly in both active and post-fire environments.

### Protect yourself

- Always do a gross field decon if there is soot or particulates on your PPE.
- Immediately and at the fire scene, wash to remove as much soot as possible from head, neck, jaw, throat, underarms and hands.
- Change your clothes and wash them ASAP after a fire.
- Shower thoroughly after a fire.
- Clean your PPE, gloves, balaclava and helmet at the hall immediately after a fire.

### Protect others

- Do not take contaminated clothes or PPE home or store them in your vehicle.
- Decon the fire apparatus interior after fires.
- Always use the exhaust extraction system when returning to the fire hall.
- Keep PPE out of living quarters. Between shifts, store PPE in the gear room.

## Resources and information

### Medical screening letters for doctors

Letters have been developed for firefighters to take to their doctors to request early medical screening based on their profession.

Download at [www.bcpffa.org](http://www.bcpffa.org) > Fire Fighter Cancers or at [www.fcabc.ca](http://www.fcabc.ca) > Library.

### Operational guidelines

Familiarize yourself with and follow OGs designed to protect your health.

- Download a sample OG for Personal Protective Clothing Equipment (PPE) Maintenance: [www.surrey.ca/PPE\\_Maintenance](http://www.surrey.ca/PPE_Maintenance)
- Download a sample OG for Exhaust Extraction Systems: [www.surrey.ca/Exhaust\\_Extraction](http://www.surrey.ca/Exhaust_Extraction)

### Research paper

The study *Firefighters and Cancer: Understanding Risk Factors within an Environment of Change* was produced in June 2015 by the University of the Fraser Valley and authored by Martha Dow, Kenneth Kunz, Len Garis and Larry Thomas.

Search at <http://cjr.ufv.ca> to read the paper.

### Health and safety information

Contact your department's Occupational Health and Safety committee or staff with other questions about your health and safety.