

# Just One Question

Tonya Bronleewe, Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center

**Asking one question can reduce the risk of cancer for the whole family.**

As a physician, you are your patient's go-to provider of cancer and disease prevention information. You are a trusted source and an inspiration for better health and preventing illness. However, with so many health messages to pass on to patients, do you struggle to prioritize? Which messages will make the most impact? There is one cancer prevention message that takes only one encounter to make a lifelong impact for the entire family. Simply ask your patients: "Have you tested your home for radon?"

*There is one cancer prevention message that takes only one encounter to make a lifelong impact for the entire family.*

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can seep up from the soil into a home. Inside our homes radon gas can build-up to levels that put those living in the home at risk for lung cancer. Radon can be found in every state and in every type of building: homes, offices, and schools.

Families are most exposed to radon at home, where they spend much of their time. The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that **all homes** be tested for radon.

## THE RISK OF NOT ASKING

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Despite reduced smoking rates over the past 50 years, lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer mortality in the U.S. Radon accounts for 26% of all cancer deaths. Of that 26%, "radon is estimated to cause about 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year, making it one of the top 10 causes of cancer mortality in the U.S."<sup>1</sup>

The estimated risk at the EPA Action Level (4pCi/L) for nonsmokers is 7 in 1,000. In smokers, the estimated risk is 62 in 1,000. Radon and tobacco

are synergistic. Reducing either of these exposures substantially reduces lung cancer risk. Radon is one of the earliest described and most comprehensively studied human carcinogens. Laboratory studies have documented that an alpha particle from radon decay can cause single- and double-stranded DNA breaks and can provide indirect genotoxic and nongenotoxic effects on traversed and neighboring non-traversed cells.



## WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

You play a vital role in decreasing the risk for radon radiation that can negatively affect your patients' health. Reducing radon radiation for your patients is as simple as including a question about radon testing as part of the electronic medical record questionnaire.

If a patient has not tested their home, encourage them to do so as a cancer prevention measure for the whole family. Radon is invisible, but it is not hard to find out if a home has elevated radon. Patients can test for radon with a do-it-yourself kit or they can hire a qualified company to do a radon test. Radon is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L). The EPA Action Level for radon is 4pCi/L. If a patient's home measures above the action level, and a second test confirms the result, they can install a radon mitigation

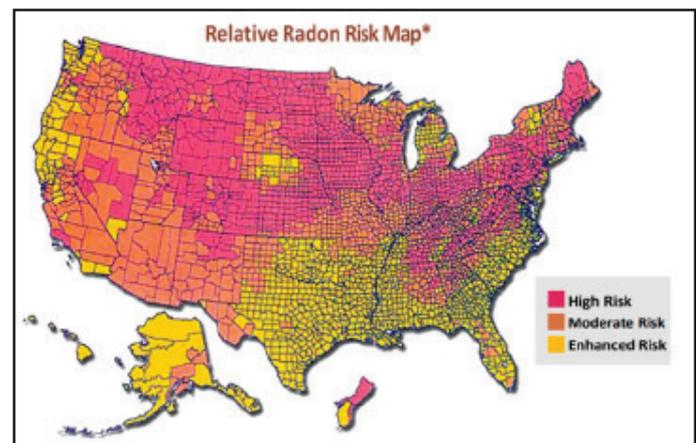
system for the cost of a typical home improvement project. A radon mitigation system reduces the risk of lung cancer for an entire family. The mitigation system will always cost less than cancer treatment medical expenses.

## JUST ADD THE QUESTION

Most physician offices use electronic medical record questionnaires to help assess patient health risks. You can add the radon question to your question-set yourself, or have your in-house IT help you add the question to your question-set. Or, contact your software provider and they will be able to include the question in your next update.

**For more information on radon and your patients visit [bit.ly/RadonRisks](http://bit.ly/RadonRisks).**

**Order "Radon Risks" posters and brochures for your office at [wichita.edu/efc](http://wichita.edu/efc).**



<sup>1</sup> EPA's 2003 Assessment of Risks from Radon in Homes (EPA 402-E-03-003)