



THYROID CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 9

The thyroid gland is a butterfly-shaped organ located in the base of the neck.

Thyroid cancer results from abnormal growth of cells in the thyroid gland. It is the commonest endocrine cancer in Hong Kong.

Am I at risk of thyroid cancer?

Risk factors of thyroid cancer include:

- Exposure to significant level of ionising radiation (including exposure to radiation fallout and history of radiation therapy to head, neck or chest in infancy/childhood)
- Family history of thyroid cancer

What are the common symptoms of thyroid cancer?

Thyroid cancer does not always have symptoms, so it can be hard to detect and diagnose.

Common symptoms include:

- Neck lump
- Neck pain
- Persistent voice changes
- Persistent sore throat
- Persistent coughing

You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.

How to reduce the chance of getting thyroid cancer?

- Exposure to ionising radiation, especially in children, should be avoided or minimised whenever possible. Take appropriate protection measure in case unavoidable.
- In cases of populations or individuals being contaminated with radioactive iodine, the thyroid can be protected by administering medication like potassium iodide.

What is thyroid cancer screening?

The purpose of thyroid cancer screening is to detect thyroid cancer before it gives rise to symptoms, so that early treatment can be initiated. The more relevant screening methods studied are neck palpation and the use of ultrasonography. However, evidence to date on the accuracy of thyroid cancer screening by these methods, either alone or in combination, is limited.

Should I get screened?

At present, there is evidence that screening for thyroid cancer for asymptomatic persons at average risk at this locality will result in harms that outweigh the benefits. Hence, screening for these persons is not recommended. On the other hand, persons at increased risk, including those with a history of head or neck irradiation in infancy or childhood, familial thyroid cancer or family history of multiple endocrine neoplasia type 2 (MEN2), should consider to seek advice from doctors regarding the need for and approach of screening.



Department of Health