

## Frequently Asked Questions about Radon

As a health care provider, you may need to answer immediate questions about radon. Here are some brief answers and resources to provide for your patients.

- 1. How does radon get into buildings?** Radon occurs naturally from breakdown of uranium contained in underground bedrock and seeps into homes, office buildings, and schools through cracks and holes in the building material. Then, because radon is heavier than air, it stays in the building and people breathe it in.
- 2. How can radon make my family sick?** You cannot see, smell, or taste radon, but it is a chemical in the air that we breathe. When people breathe air that contains radon, they are more likely to develop lung cancer. In fact, for people who do not smoke, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer. It is responsible for about 20,000 deaths from lung cancer every year.
- 3. What can I do to protect my family from radon?** Have your home tested using the coupon in this packet or find a place that has test kits by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON (1-800-767-7236). You can also find out more about testing by looking at the National Safety Council's website <http://www.nsc.org/issues/radon/> and the American Lung Association's website <http://www.lungusa.org>. Finally, keep your ears open about news from your state or local health departments, because they may be giving out free do-it-yourself test kits from time to time.
- 4. I tested my home and have a radon problem, now what?** You should look for a qualified contractor to fix the radon problem. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a great guide to hiring a contractor at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/consguid.html>. If you don't have access to a computer, you can call your state or local health department and ask for the State Radon office.
- 5. If radon is so dangerous, why haven't I heard of it before?** Just like it took a long time for everyone to learn about the dangers of smoking cigarettes, it will take a while to spread the word about radon. We do not know everything about this health risk, but all major health organizations confirm it causes cancer.
- 6. Can I reduce my family's exposure to radon before our home is fixed?** It is important to fix your radon problem as soon as possible. You can decrease the amount of radon you breathe a little bit by spending less time indoors, particularly trying to spend less time on the ground level of the building. Play with our children outside when the weather is nice!

## Resources

**National Safety Council** <http://www.nsc.org/issues/radon/>: This site provides information about testing for radon in homes, offices, schools and other buildings.

**American Lung Association**

<http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9OoE&b=35395>: Under the Air Quality section of the website, there is a lot of information about radon and ways to prevent it.

**Environmental Protection Agency**

<http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/consguid.html>: This site will guide you through picking out a contractor and starting to protect your home.

**National Radon Information Line** 1-800-SOS-RADON (1-800-767-7236): Call this number to learn more about ways to test and protect yourself from radon.

**National Hispanic Indoor Air Quality Hotline** 1-800-SALUD-2 (1-800-725-8312): This agency will provide people with radon-related information in Spanish. They also distribute kits with bilingual instructions.

## Test your home for RADON!

- US Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/)
- National Radon Information Hotline: 800-SOS-RADON
  - Air Chek Radon Test <http://www.radon.com/sub/cehn/>
  - National Lung Association: <http://www.lungusa.org/>



Children's Environmental Health Network  
[www.cehn.org](http://www.cehn.org)

**Protect your family from this cancer-causing chemical**

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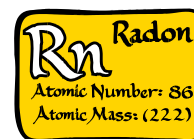


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# Radon



## What is Radon?

Radon is a natural gas that is released when uranium decays in soil and water. Radon is a form of radiation that you can't see, smell, or taste.<sup>i</sup>

Radon get into a building typically by moving up through the ground and then through cracks and other holes in the foundation. A building traps radon inside and the build-up gas can reach a harmful concentration. **Any building (homes, offices, and hospitals) can have a radon problem.**<sup>ii</sup>

## What are the health concerns related to Radon?<sup>ii</sup>

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists indoor radon as one of the most serious environmental health problems in the United States.
- Radon is responsible for up to 20,000 lung cancer deaths each year.
- Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers, and about 2,900 non-smokers die from lung cancer caused by radon exposure each year.

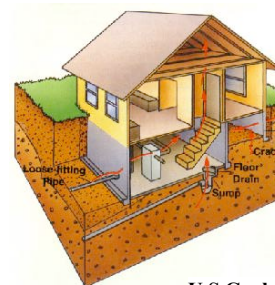
## Radon and Children

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that children are at higher risk than adults, even though there is a long period between exposure and the development of cancer. However,

- Children have smaller lungs and therefore higher breathing rates.<sup>iii</sup>
- Children spend up to 70% more time indoors than adults on average, so many children will have more exposure to this carcinogen.<sup>iv</sup>
- Radon-related lung cancer is associated with the amount of total lifelong exposure, so any childhood exposure would contribute to the cumulative health risk for that individual.

## Health Care, Preschool and Home Settings

Any building (such as homes, office buildings and hospitals) can have dangerous levels of radon. According to the EPA, a nationwide survey of radon levels in schools estimates that nearly one in five has at least one schoolroom with a radon level that is higher than the recommended levels.<sup>ii</sup>



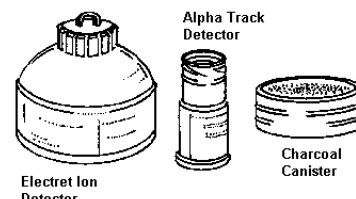
U.S Geological Survey

## What your office or place of practice can do:

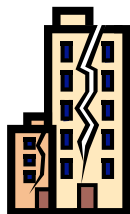
Follow the guidelines below to test your office to ensure there are not dangerous levels of radon in the building. If you find a high level, you should take appropriate radon reduction steps to reduce the radon to a safe level, Considering you and your patients are spending a large amount of time in this area, you want it to be a safe-breathing zone.

## What your patients can do:

- The EPA and the office of the Surgeon General recommend that all homes be tested and that the annual average radon level at or above 4pCi/L (picocuries per liter) be fixed.<sup>iii</sup>
- **The only way to detect radon is through testing.**<sup>i</sup>
  - Common test kits: charcoal canisters (short term, 2-7 days), e-perm (short/long term), alpha track detectors (long term, 91-365 days), and charcoal liquid scintillation devices.
  - Follow the directions of the kits closely because the length of time the kits can remain open varies.
  - Place the test kit in the basement or lowest lived-in level of a home, and after a specified amount of time mail the kit to the manufacturer to be analyzed.
  - **Radon levels vary every day.** It is best to do two short-term tests for at least 48 hours, either at the same time or one after one another, to get the average.



[www.usinspect.com/Radon/physician.asp](http://www.usinspect.com/Radon/physician.asp)



- Because **no** level of exposure to radon is considered safe, the EPA also recommends that the public consider fixing their homes if their levels are between 2pCi/L and 4pCi/L.<sup>ii</sup>
- Fixing buildings to reduce radon may involve sealing cracks in the foundation or ventilating the area under the foundation. Expert assistance should usually be obtained when radon reduction is being attempted.

## Resources

- US Environmental Protection Agency - [www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/)
  - National Radon Information Hotline: 800-SOS-RADON
  - Office of Environmental Management  
GA Department of Community Affairs  
60 Executive Park South, Atlanta, Georgia 30329
    - Joe Dunlop, Coordinator of Radon Program  
Phone:(404) 679-1598      Email: [jdunlop@dca.state.ga.us](mailto:jdunlop@dca.state.ga.us)
    - Randy Hartmann, OEM Director  
Phone: (404) 679-4816      Email: [rhartmann@dca.state.ga.us](mailto:rhartmann@dca.state.ga.us)
- Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (radon videos)  
[http://www.dep.state.pa.us/brp/Radon\\_Division/Radon\\_Homepage.htm](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/brp/Radon_Division/Radon_Homepage.htm)
- National Safety Council's radon page - [www.nsc.org/ehc/radon.htm](http://www.nsc.org/ehc/radon.htm)
- National Lung Association's radon page -  
[http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9OoE&b=35395:](http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9OoE&b=35395)
- National Environmental Health Association: Radon Mitigation Providers by Area  
[www.radongas.org/Description\\_of\\_Radon\\_Mitigation\\_Services.html](http://www.radongas.org/Description_of_Radon_Mitigation_Services.html)



<sup>i</sup> Southface: Radon Resources and FAQ web site. 2006. Available at [http://southface.org/web/resources&services/radon/sf\\_radon-menu.htm](http://southface.org/web/resources&services/radon/sf_radon-menu.htm). Accessed 28 February 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Environmental Protection Agency: Radon. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/radon/index.html> Accessed 10/18/07.

<sup>iii</sup> University of Minnesota. Radon for Kids. Available at [www1.umn.edu/eoh/hazards/hazardssite/radon/radonforkids.html](http://www1.umn.edu/eoh/hazards/hazardssite/radon/radonforkids.html) Accessed 26 August 2007.

<sup>iv</sup> University of Minnesota EOH. Radon Risk Assessment. <http://enhs.umn.edu/hazards/hazardssite/radon/radonriskassessment.html> Accessed 18 October 2007.