4-3-25

YOUR VOICE » Jill Thompson

Now is the best time to test for cancer-causing radon gas, found in 46% of Colorado homes

Radon remains the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and the latest American Lung Association "State of Lung Cancer" report reveals that in Colorado, about 46% of radon test results equal or exceed the Environmental Protection Agency action level of 4 pCi/L. During the winter months, the Lung Association in Colorado strongly urges all residents to test their home for radon and take immediate steps to mitigate if high levels are found.

Radon is a colorless, odorless and tasteless naturally occurring radioactive gas emitted from the ground. Radon can enter a home through cracks in floors, basement walls, foundations and other openings. Radon can be present at high levels inside homes, schools and other buildings. It is responsible for an estimated 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year and is the leading cause of lung cancer in people who have never smoked.

"In the U.S., people spend an average of 90% of their time indoors, and with more people working from home, indoor air quality can significantly impact your health. There are many things we can do to improve our indoor air quality, like not smoking inside, not burning candles and using non-toxic cleaning supplies, but testing for radon is critical to preventing lung cancer," said Tracey Maruyama, MA, health promotions manager for the American Lung Association in Colorado. "Radon exposure is a serious risk year-round, but during the winter months, homes are sealed tighter to retain heat, and that means radon is also more likely to accumulate.."

The only way to detect radon in a home is to test your home. Do-it-yourself test kits are simple to use and inexpensive. They are available for sale on the Lung Association's website at tinyurl.com/35vv6jce and at most local home improvement stores. Free test kits and radon mitigation assistance for low-income residents are also available through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's website.

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The EPA urges anyone with radon levels at or above 4 picoCuries per liter (pCi/L) to take action to install a mitigation system in their homes. Both the EPA and the American Lung Association recommend that mitigation be considered if levels are greater than 2 pCi/L. After high levels are detected, a radon professional should install a radon mitigation system, which is easy and relatively affordable. A typical radon mitigation system consists of sealing cracks and other openings in the foundation of your home and a vent pipe. This system draws radon gas from the soil underneath the home's foundation and vents it through the roof of your home. An exhaust fan is added for new construction or if extra power is needed.

To learn more about radon testing and mitigation, visit at Lung.org/radon and take the Lung Association's free Radon Basics course at Lung.org/radon-basics.

Jill Thompson is a national director of media relations for the American Lung Association.