Emergency Responders Health Center
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PATIENT INFORMATION

Advanced Cardiac & Cancer Ultrasound Screening Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the cardiac and cancer ultrasound screening initiative?

The purpose of this initiative is to provide active-duty Fire and Police Responders age 40 or older with limited ultrasound screening exams that may help identify certain cardiac-, vascular-, or cancer-related findings earlier than they might otherwise be detected. Ultrasound screening is intended to support preventative health and wellness care. However, it does not replace a complete diagnostic medical evaluation or routine care with your medical provider.

What are the potential benefits of ultrasound screening?

Limited ultrasound screening may help identify findings that could benefit from additional monitoring, evaluation, or treatment. Potential benefits may include:

- Earlier identification of certain abnormalities
- Additional information to support preventative health planning
- Increased awareness of personal health risks
- Opportunity for timely follow up with an ERHC medical provider

What are the potential risks or limitations of ultrasound screening?

Like all screening tests, ultrasound has limitations. Ultrasound screening may not detect every medical condition, and some findings may require additional evaluation to determine whether they are clinically significant. The screening protocols are designed to provide screening imaging and are not considered full diagnostic evaluations.

Potential risks or limitations include:

- **False positives:** Screening results may flag an abnormality that is insignificant or benign. Not every finding detected will require treatment or affect overall health. Screening may indicate findings that need further evaluation, causing stress or anxiety.
- **False negatives:** Screening may not detect every condition. A normal result does not guarantee the absence of disease.
- **Image and interpretive limitations:** Body size, shape, or positioning may reduce or affect image quality. Because this is a limited screening study, radiologist and cardiologist interpretation is based only on the images obtained. Findings may be less complete than a full diagnostic ultrasound evaluation.
- **Additional evaluation costs:** Any follow-up diagnostic testing, imaging, laboratory testing, specialist consultation, or other medical evaluation may create out-of-pocket costs depending on my individual insurance plan.

Is there a cost for the initial ultrasound screening?

The initial ultrasound screening is provided at no cost to eligible first responder participants. The cost of the initial screening is offset by a grant, sponsored by the First Responders Health Institute (FRHI) and made possible through a generous grant from the HMWCF.

Will I be responsible for the cost of additional testing?

Yes. If the ultrasound screening identifies a finding that requires additional follow-up, any further diagnostic testing, imaging, laboratory work, specialist consultation, or related medical care, these additional services will be submitted through the patient's personal insurance. Patients may be responsible for any deductibles, copays, coinsurance, or costs not covered by their insurance plan.

What does the screening involve?

This initiative is designed to identify cardiac-, vascular-, and cancer-related findings.

The two screening exams performed are the following:

- **Echocardiogram:** These screenings evaluates the heart structure, heart valves, blood flow, and overall heart function.
  *[Fasting **is not** required]*
- **Carotid Artery Imaging:** These screenings focus on the carotid arteries in the neck to identify potential plaque buildup, blockages, or reduced blood flow that may increase stroke risk.
- **Vascular Screening:** These screenings evaluate the abdominal aorta to detect signs of aneurysms and atherosclerosis (plaque).
- **Cancer Screening:** These screenings are to evaluate for the presence of masses, complex cysts, abnormal enlargement, or other abnormalities of the thyroid gland, abdominal organs (including liver, gallbladder, bile ducts, spleen, pancreas and kidneys), and pelvic organs including the urinary bladder, ovaries in females, and scrotum in males.
  *[Fasting **is** required for portions of this exam. Please refer to the "How should I prepare for my appointment?" for additional information]*

What can a limited ultrasound screening detect?

- **Echocardiogram:** Enlarged heart (LVH, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy), value abnormalities (such as stenosis or regurgitation), reduced heart ejection fraction (pump function), fluid buildup around the heart, or signs of structural heart disease.
- **Carotid Artery Imaging:** Plaque buildup within the artery walls, narrowing of the carotid arteries, or reduced blood flow, all of which are risk factors for stroke.
- **Vascular Screening:** Abdominal aortic aneurysms (an enlarged or bulging section of the aorta) and/or atherosclerosis (plaque buildup) in the abdominal aorta.
- **Cancer Screening:** Masses, or tumors, simple or complex cysts, organ enlargement and other abnormalities depending on the organs evaluated.

How should I prepare for my appointment?

For all patients and appointments: Wear loose-fitting clothing, as the sonographers will need access to the neck, chest, and abdominal areas during the examination. Female patients are advised to wear a sports bra for comfort and convenience. A water-soluble gel is used on the ultrasound transducer to capture images.

FASTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CANCER & VASCULAER ULTRASOUND SCREENING(S)

FOR ALL PATIENTS:

Do not eat or drink anything for **6-8 hours** before your scheduled appointment, including coffee and other beverages.

FEMALE PATIENTS ONLY:

In addition to the fasting instructions above, drink **32 oz.** (1 liter) **of water** (non-carbonated) **1-hour before your appointment and arrive with a full bladder**.

This is **an exception to the fasting instructions above** and is required for the ovarian screening portion.

Consuming food or drinking beverages within 6-8 hours of your appointment (outside of instructions given to female patients) may cause images to appear unclear or inaccurate, which could affect the quality of the screening results.

For additional preparation details, please review the Ultrasound Exam Preparation Guide

How long does the appointment take?

Each appointment takes approximately 45-60 minutes, including check-in, a brief review with the ultrasound sonographers, and positioning for the different imaging exams.

How do I schedule a limited ultrasound screening?

If you are an eligible active-duty Fire or Police Responder age 40 or older, you are eligible to schedule your limited ultrasound screening:

- **Call our office at (208) 366-5675** to speak with our Ultrasound Liaison and Medical Receptionist. They can provide access to our online scheduling link and assist with any questions about the scheduling process.

The Limited Ultrasound Screening is completed over two separate appointments:

- Cancer, Vascular & Carotid Screening (General Ultrasound) – *Available on Thursdays*
- Cardiac Screening (Echocardiogram) – *Available on select Saturdays or Sundays*

If you are an established ERHC patient:

We recommend scheduling your ultrasound screenings a few weeks before your Annual Wellness Examination (A.W.E.), so your results are ready when you meet with your provider (see "When will I review my results?" below). As part of your A.W.E., we also recommend completing your fasting labs right after your General Ultrasound Screening visit, since both require fasting.

If you are not an established ERHC patient:

Active Fire and Police Responders who are not established patients can call our office to schedule your screening. Once complete, your images and results can be sent to your Primary Care Provider upon request, in accordance with HIPAA privacy regulations.

How will I receive my ultrasound results?

Results should typically be available through the ERHC patient portal (eClinicalWorks) within roughly 5-7 business days after the ultrasound exam, though timing can vary. Patients are encouraged to check their patient portal for their results, if needing assistance, please contact ERHC with any questions or concerns.

For additional information on how to access the patient portal, please review the Healow Patient Portal Resource

When will I review my results?

Your ultrasound screening results will be reviewed during your scheduled Annual Wellness Examination (A.W.E.) with your ERHC medical provider. This review is offered as a courtesy by ERHC for participating in this initiative and is not a standard part of the department-sponsored A.W.E.

During that visit, your provider will go over your results, answer any questions, and discuss whether additional follow-up testing, monitoring, or referral is needed.

What happens if additional testing or referral is recommended?

If the ERHC medical provider determines that additional evaluation is needed, the provider will discuss the recommended next steps with the patient. This may include referral or diagnostic imaging, specialist evaluation, laboratory testing, or other appropriate follow-up care.

Any additional testing or referrals will be submitted through the patient's personal insurance.

Does a normal ultrasound screening mean I do not need other medical care?

No. A normal ultrasound screening does not replace routine preventative care, Annual Wellness Examinations (AWE's), age-appropriate cancer screening, cardiovascular risk assessment, or medical evaluation for symptoms. Patients should continue regular care with their ERHC medical provider and report any new or concerning symptoms promptly.

Who do I contact with questions about the ultrasound screening initiative?

Call (208) 366-5675. If no one is available to answer, please leave a voice message, and our ultrasound liaison will follow up with you as soon as they're able.

Who do I contact about my results, portal access, or follow-up care?

If you have additional questions about your results, or need assistance with accessing your patient portal, contact ERHC's main line at (208) 229-3742 to speak with a medical receptionist for assistance.