

## Study Supports Early Screening For Lung Cancer

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Advocates of precautionary screening for lung cancer found new evidence that the practice benefits smokers and others at increased risk for the disease.

The research, published this week in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, could hasten a growing movement to recommend annual computerized tomography, or CT, scans for such patients even when they show no symptoms of lung cancer. Precautionary screening has gained popularity among those at risk for breast, cervical, prostate and colon cancers, but the same hasn't been true for lung cancer, which accounts for more deaths than any other form of the disease.

"This is the evidence that we needed to really take annual screening of smokers into the mainstream," said Claudia I. Henschke, lead author of the study and a professor of radiology at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University. "There really needs to be consideration of integrating this into the health-care system."

In the largest study of its kind, Dr. Henschke and other researchers for the International Early Lung Cancer Action Program confirmed what they have long contended: that lung cancer caught by CT scans can be cured at a remarkably high rate.

They screened more than 30,000 smokers, former smokers and people exposed to secondhand smoke. Of the 412 participants found to have first-stage lung cancer, the 10-year survival rate was 88%, far higher than the 49.5% survival rate for five years that is typical for first-stage detection of the disease. The screening detected cancer earlier and allowed patients to get treatment sooner than they would have otherwise, researchers said.

Robert A. Smith, director of screening for the American Cancer Society, said his group could ultimately reconsider its current neutral guidance on precautionary screening for lung cancer.

Laurie Fenton, president of the Lung Cancer Alliance, an advocacy group in Washington, said the discrepancy in screening practices for different types of cancers amounts to a double standard. Victims of lung cancer, she said, are often perceived to be at fault for their illness when they have prior histories of smoking.

"It's hard to demand the same level of compassion and support as other cancers," Ms. Fenton said. "Mammograms, colonoscopies -- you don't see the same doubts about those tests as you do for CT scans of the lungs."