

America's worst cancer killer

In terms of new cases, lung cancer is the third most common form of cancer, behind breast and prostate cancers. But in terms of deaths, lung cancer kills the most people by far – more than breast, colon, pancreas and prostate cancer combined. And because Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana have some of the nation's highest smoking rates, lung cancer incidence and deaths in this region remain higher than national average.

Lung cancer deaths

Figures reflect average annual number of deaths by state, based on 2003 data

	Total deaths per year	Rate per 100,000 population	
		Male	Female
U.S.	160,440	79.5	40.7
Ohio:	7,130	88.0	44.4
Kentucky:	3,380	114.3	52.3
Indiana:	4,150	93.7	45.6

New lung cancer cases

Figures reflect average annual number of newly diagnosed cases by state.

	Total cases per year	Rate per 100,000 population	
		Male	Female
U.S.	173,770	91.5	53.4
Ohio:	7,720	101.9	56.2
Kentucky:	3,660	138.9	68.7
Indiana:	4,490	102.4	53.7

Surviving lung cancer

Lung cancer has the worst survival rates among the most common types of cancer.

Cancer type	5-year survival all stages	Detected early	Detected late
Lung	14.9%	48.7%	2.1%
Breast	86.6%	97.0%	23.3%
Prostate	97.5%	100%	34.0%
Colon	62.3%	90.1%	9.2%

Lung cancer symptoms

Persistent cough, sputum streaked with blood, chest pain, and recurring pneumonia or bronchitis.

Lung cancer risk factors

The biggest risk by far is smoking. Exposure to radon gas, asbestos, environmental tobacco smoke, and a history of frequent occupational or medical exposure to radiation also can trigger lung cancer. Most recently, researchers have narrowed a search for an inherited genetic trait that could increase lung cancer risk.

Detecting lung cancer

Historically, lung cancer is detected through chest X-ray, sputum samples or fiberoptic exams of bronchial passages. None have been consistently effective at detecting lung cancer in early stages. More recently, some studies have shown that chest CT scans can detect early-stage tumors. However, there are concerns about a high rate of "false positive" results that detect suspicious masses that aren't cancer.

Treating lung cancer

If caught early enough, surgery to remove a portion of the lung offers the best chance of long-term survival. In cases detected at later stages, patients usually get a combination of radiation and chemotherapy, which sometimes can extend life. A newer chemotherapy drug, called Iressa, has shown some promise in advanced cases of lung cancer.

Source: American Cancer Society

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