

## American Lung Association ranks MD above average for lung cancer treatment



"There's never a bad time to stop smoking," says Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos, a pulmonologist at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, "even if you've just been diagnosed with lung cancer. If you can quit, you'll still have better outcomes than if you smoke through your treatment." (AP file)



The American Lung Association ranked Maryland at or above average on most measures of quality lung cancer care in a report card released Wednesday.

“I think it’s good that in Maryland we’re doing so well,” said Dr. Ashutosh Sachdeva, a pulmonologist and director of the Interventional Pulmonology Program at the University of Maryland Medical System. “We see the number of people diagnosed is gradually coming down; that probably has to do with the number of people smoking coming down.”

Maryland doctors detect 49 cases of lung cancer for every 100,000 residents, compared to 52.8 per 100,000 nationally, according to the report. Patients in the state facing lung cancer can expect better-than-average chances of survival with fewer complications based on key measures of diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care.

More than 28% of lung cancers were detected early, when survival rates are better — a 12% improvement over five years. Also, more than 24% received surgery as a first treatment, compared with 20.7% nationally — a 10% improvement. Early diagnosis and surgery can prevent recurrence in most cases, the release said. After treatment, 31.2% of patients survive for five or more years, compared with the national average of 29.7%.

The report found some areas for improvement. In Maryland, 18.7% of patients receive no treatment. While still better than the national average, this represents a 13% increase in untreated lung cancers since 2020. Latinos are also least likely to be diagnosed early, at 22.8% compared to 29.6% for white patients.

The [American Cancer Society reports](#) that lung cancer is the second most common cancer in both men and women, and is the top killer. Nearly 125,000 Americans are expected to die from lung cancer this year.

## Success stories

Maryland boasts a concentration of research hospitals and universities offering the latest in technology and care and access to clinical trials.

At Johns Hopkins [Kimmel Cancer Center, promising research](#) has found greater success in treating an aggressive form of cancer caused by asbestos exposure. In a study published in September in Nature Medicine, Hopkins researchers paired immune therapy both before and after surgery with testing for cancer DNA — traces of the tumor's genetic material — in the blood.

Half of patients receiving these treatments survived more than 28 months — ten months longer than average — with 36% showing no recurrence at their follow-up appointments.

A [Kimmel Cancer Center analysis published in July](#) found that lung cancer patients who received immunotherapy in addition to chemotherapy before surgery had significantly higher survival rates. Almost one in four patients achieved complete remission and of those, 95% survived five years or more after surgery.

Cancer hides from the patient's immune system, because it has almost the same genetic material as the rest of the body. Immune therapy helps the body recognize mutations in the cancerous cells, freeing the immune system to go to work on the tumor.

A Frederick-based hospital found success beating the odds through an aggressive lung cancer screening and treatment program. Frederick Health catches 40% of lung cancers in the earliest stages, when surgery can be most effective and survival rates are highest, according to the American Lung Association. Nationally, the association states, only 27% of lung cancers are caught early.

At the University of Maryland Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Katherine Scilla, a medical oncologist specializing in lung cancer, said she is excited by new achievements and treatments that personalize care to individual patients and specific cancer mutations.

“We’ve really seen the availability of treatment options expand within lung cancer, especially,” she said. “It’s really exciting to be able to offer those varieties of treatment to our patients.”

*Have a news tip? Contact Karl Hille at 443-900-7891 or [khille@baltsun.com](mailto:khille@baltsun.com).*