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National Cancer Institute researchers now have clear evidence that a type of low dose radiation CT scan called spiral CT can help reduce the risk of lung cancer death by 20 percent.

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"CT Study a Breakthrough for Lung Cancer." Rehema Ellis, correspondent. *NBC Nightly News.*
CT Study a Breakthrough for Lung Cancer

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
And we turn quickly now to some important health news we learned about today about the number one cancer killer in this country, men and women: lung cancer. New research out tonight shows a certain kind of scan, when done as a routine test, can cut the death rate, and the numbers are significant. Our report tonight from NBC's Rehema Ellis.

REHEMA ELLIS reporting:
For the first time, researchers have clear evidence that a type of screening X-ray called a low-dose spiral CT scan can actually help reduce the death rate from lung cancer. The test has been a huge medical controversy for years, but researchers resolved it with a study of 53,000 current and former heavy smokers, 55 to 74 years old.

Dr. REGINALD MUNDEN (MD Anderson Cancer Center): We will be able to pick up a early cancer. And if it's picked up, there's a chance that you will survive this cancer.

ELLIS: The participants smoked an average of a pack a day or 30 years. The study compared the effects of two tests to detect lung cancer. Some got a low-dose spiral CT scan once a year for three years, others got a standard chest X-ray. All were followed for up to another five years.

There were 20 percent fewer deaths from lung cancer among those who got the CT scan. GE, the parent company of NBC Universal, is one of several companies that manufactures the scanners. Doctors emphasize the study did not include nonsmokers, who make up 15 percent of lung cancer victims. And there are some concerns about risks of cumulative radiation exposure from the CT screening test, plus the test also procured a 25 percent false positive rate.

Dr. DOUGLAS LOWY (National Cancer Institute): But those abnormalities need to be followed up.

ELLIS: And that could involve unnecessary biopsy or surgery. Recommendations about who should get CT screening for lung cancer could be released within a few months. Doctors say that might influence insurance companies and Medicare to change their policies and cover the scans, which cost 300 to $400.
While doctors say the CT scan is a breakthrough in lung cancer detection, they caution it's not a license to smoke. Rehema Ellis, NBC News, New York.