

A blood test can detect cancers well before symptoms show up. Don't expect private insurers or the government to cover costs anytime soon

Early diagnosis is the best defense against most cancers, as President Biden noted when he announced his Cancer Moonshot initiative two years ago. But only a handful of cancers—of the breast, lung, colon and cervix—have screening tests recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel that evaluates medical screenings.

Many companies are developing blood tests that can detect cancer signals before symptoms occur, and Grail's is the most advanced. A study found it can identify more than 50 types of cancer 52% of the time and the 12 deadliest cancers in Stages I through III [68% of the time](#).

There's a hitch. The test costs \$949 and isn't covered by Medicare or most private insurance.

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Most Americans can't afford [to pay out of pocket], and some public-health experts think that's just as well. They fret that widespread use of multicancer early-detection tests would cause healthcare spending to explode. Those fears have snarled Galleri and similar tests in a web of red tape.

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Because Grail uses machine learning to detect DNA-methylation cancer linkages, the Grail test's accuracy should improve as more tests and patient data are collected. [Grail president Dr. Josh] Ofman says the company also aims to reduce the test's cost by scaling up manufacturing and detecting cancers with less genetic sequencing.

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