NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana men no longer have the highest known lung cancer rates, not because health has improved, but because researchers have more information.

Kentucky leads in lung cancer among white men in the states and cities studied, and Delaware has the highest incidence in black men, according to a report released Tuesday.

Louisiana ranks No. 2 for white men and No. 5 for black men out of the 19 states studied, said Vivien W. Chen, the New Orleans epidemiologist who is the editor of "Cancer in North America, 1991-1995." Chen, who has overseen the annual publication of such five-year studies since 1988, said new information makes her wonder whether Louisiana ever really was at the top.

Delaware reported cancer statistics before, Chen said, but had not ranked so high in this category. Because Chen's study merely examines the numbers, not the reasons behind them, she could not explain why Delaware moved up.

Lung cancer accounted for 28 percent of all cancer deaths in the five years studied. Louisiana men are still above the national average in cases of this disease: 32 percent higher than the national norm for white men and 18 percent above the national rate for black men, the survey shows.

Figures from Kentucky and Wisconsin had not been available because their registries had not met standards of the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries, which released the report at its annual meeting in Chicago. To be eligible, a registry must collect statistics for five years, cover at least 90 percent of its area and establish procedures for weeding out faulty and duplicate information, said Chen, director of the Louisiana Tumor Registry at LSU Medical Center.

The new report, with cancer information from 19 states and Atlanta and Seattle, covers about 45 percent of the population, making it the country's largest database, she said.

To try to be as comprehensive as possible in its annual report, the journal is noting trends not only in black and white people but also in such smaller groups as Native American and people of Asian descent.

Although the major strains of this disease, such as cancers of the prostate, breast, lung and colon, dominate the publication, it also contains information on such topics as the prevalence of stomach cancer among Japanese- and Korean-Americans and thyroid cancer among Filipino-American women.

"These are common cancers, but in different ethnic groups, cancer patterns are very different," Chen said.

For instance, cancer-trackers for this study found:

- Kidney and bladder cancers are among the top five strains in Native American and Eskimos.
- Liver cancer is a major threat to Chinese-, Korean- and Vietnamese-American men.

During the five years the book covers, 2,637,792 people in the United States died of cancer, with lung cancer accounting for 28 percent.