

COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, refers to two lung conditions that worsen over time – chronic bronchitis and emphysema. People with COPD suffer from frequent coughing, wheezing, excess mucus, and difficulty breathing. They may have difficulty walking or climbing stairs, confusion, or memory loss, or require a portable oxygen tank. They may also suffer from depression or other mental health issues. Tobacco smoke is the primary cause of COPD. Environmental factors also play a role and can make COPD symptoms worse. It is treatable but not curable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of 2016, chronic lower respiratory disease, primarily COPD, was the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. More than 16 million Americans have COPD, with many more undiagnosed.

HOW OUR ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS COPD

Indoor (secondhand smoke) and workplace air pollution play a role in COPD. Using wood or other biomass fuels for indoor cooking and heating can also increase COPD risk. People with asthma are more likely to be diagnosed with COPD.

HOW TO REDUCE COPD SYMPTOMS

- Consult a health care provider.
- Take COPD medication regularly, as prescribed.
- Do not smoke or work to quit smoking.
- Avoid secondhand smoke and other air pollutants.
- Check local air quality on the [AirNow¹](#) website.
- Ask a doctor about pulmonary rehabilitation for personal strategies to manage COPD.
- Get vaccines to protect against the flu and pneumococcal pneumonia to protect against lung infections.
- Use supplemental oxygen, as prescribed.



MONITORING COPD IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania tracks COPD-related hospital visits. Data are on the [Enterprise Data Dissemination Informatics Exchange²](#) (EDDIE) by county, and by sex, race/ethnicity, and age group. The data come from the state inpatient hospitalization datasets maintained by the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4). The state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) also tracks COPD on the EDDIE, as indicated by whether they have ever been told they have COPD, emphysema, or chronic bronchitis. With this data, people who are more at risk for COPD can be identified, and more effective interventions can be developed. As of 2017, the BRFSS estimates that 7% of Pennsylvania adults reported ever being told they have COPD. That is more than half a million people.

COPD RESOURCES IN PENNSYLVANIA

The American Lung Association sponsors 23 active [Better Breathers³](#) clubs in Pennsylvania. These clubs provide social and educational support to COPD, asthma, and other lung disease patients and their caregivers.

If you have any questions, contact us
Phone: 717.787.3350
Fax: 717.772.6975
Email:
env.health.concern@pa.gov

October 2022

¹ <http://www.airnow.gov/>

² <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/HealthStatistics/EDDIE/Pages/EDDIE.aspx>

³ <https://www.lung.org/support-and-community/better-breathers-club/>