

New NIH data show gains in COPD awareness

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The number of Americans who report being aware of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, increased by 4 percentage points between 2008 and 2010, but many people at risk are still unaware of the disease, according to mailed survey results released today by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health.

Sixty-nine percent of adults said they are aware of COPD. However, up to 30 percent of Americans reported that they were unaware of the condition. Awareness increased steadily among current and former smokers as well as nonsmokers.

"COPD kills more than 120,000 adults each year. That's one death every four minutes -- more than [breast cancer](#) and diabetes combined. Yet people go undiagnosed and untreated because they don't recognize the symptoms," said James P. Kiley, Ph.D., director of the NHLBI's Division of Lung Diseases. "Through the NHLBI's COPD Learn More Breathe Better campaign, we are focusing on empowering people with knowledge that can bring greater quality of life."

To improve awareness of COPD symptoms, the NHLBI is launching a new public service announcement campaign that highlights common COPD signs and symptoms including: frequent shortness of breath, chronic cough, wheezing, and excessive phlegm production.

Individuals living with these symptoms often believe it is just a result of

getting older or being out of shape, and may not think the symptoms warrant a doctor's visit. Not true. COPD is a serious lung disease that makes it difficult to breathe and can cause long-term disability.

Sometimes referred to as emphysema or chronic bronchitis, COPD is now the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. More than 12 million people are currently diagnosed with COPD. And it is estimated that another 12 million may have COPD but not realize it.

"For those who may be experiencing a recurrent cough or shortness of breath, particularly those who may have a history of smoking, awareness of the symptoms is not enough. They need to have their lungs tested," said Kiley. "There is no cure for COPD -- but the good news is that we have come a long way in terms of improving how a person with COPD lives, and it only takes a few minutes in the doctor's office to get tested."

The NHLBI analyzed the results of the annual HealthStyles surveys of the public health attitudes, knowledge, practices, and lifestyle habits of consumers, conducted each year by Porter Novelli, communications contractor for the NHLBI's COPD Learn More Breathe Better campaign. The results represent a sample of 4,184 consumers through a mailed survey with a margin of error of plus or minus 1.5 percentage points. Both surveys were conducted in summer 2010.

The NHLBI initiated the COPD Learn More Breathe Better campaign, the first national awareness campaign on COPD, in 2007 to improve knowledge about COPD among those already diagnosed or at risk for COPD as well as health care providers, particularly those in a primary care setting.

More information: The COPD Learn More Breathe Better Campaign: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/copd/Diseases and Conditions Index: COPD: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/D..._opd/Copd_WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/copd/Diseases_and_Conditions_Index:_COPD:_www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/D..._opd/Copd_WhatIs.html)

Provided by National Institutes of Health

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