



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Take a Deep Breath

World COPD Day — November 18, 2009

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Just because you don't smoke doesn't mean you're not susceptible to a lung condition that is quickly becoming one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, makes it difficult to breathe and is commonly caused by exposure to cigarette smoke.

Dr. Letitia Presley-Cantrell is a scientist with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss COPD. Welcome to the show, Letitia.

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Letitia, can you give us some idea how big of a problem COPD is?

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] Sure. COPD is the major cause of disability and the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. About 12 million adults have been diagnosed with COPD and about 24 million Americans are affected by COPD, so roughly about half of the persons that are likely to have COPD don't even know that they have it.

[Dr. Gaynes] Besides cigarette smoke, are there other causes of COPD?

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] Yes. Cigarette smoking is the main risk factor for COPD. Most cases develop after exposure to irritants that damage the lung, so in addition to cigarette smoking, exposure to occupational dust and chemicals, indoor and outdoor air pollutants, and genetic and respiratory factors all play a role in the development and progression of COPD.

[Dr. Gaynes] Letitia, what are the symptoms of COPD?

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] Constant coughing, shortness of breath while doing activities you were once able to do, producing large amounts of mucous, feeling like you can't breathe, not being able to take a deep breath, and wheezing are all symptoms of COPD. COPD is progressive, so symptoms get worse over time. Persons with these symptoms who currently smoke or have smoked in the past or anyone with respiratory problems should have a simple breathing test, preformed by a physician, to determine if they have COPD.

[Dr. Gaynes] So, how is COPD treated?

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] While there is no cure for COPD, treatments with medications, rehabilitation, oxygen therapy, surgery, and lifestyle changes can help you feel better and slow the progression of the disease. COPD should be evaluated and treated by a physician. If you are a smoker, we encourage you to talk with your physician about programs to help you quit. Most symptoms of COPD, such as coughing or wheezing, can be treated with medications, such as bronchodilators and inhaled steroids. Your doctor may also ask you to participate in pulmonary rehabilitation, or rehab, to help you learn how to manage your COPD through exercise and counseling so that you can continue to do your daily activities. For the more severe cases of COPD, your doctor might prescribe oxygen to help with your shortness of breath. For very severe cases, surgery might be recommended.

[Dr. Gaynes] Letitia, where can listeners get more information about COPD?

[Dr. Presley-Cantrell] If you'd like to learn more about COPD, go to www.cdc.gov/COPD.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Letitia. I've been talking today with CDC's Letitia Presley-Cantrell about chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Exposure to cigarettes, either directly or by breathing second-hand smoke, is the leading risk factor for COPD. It's treatable, especially if diagnosed early, but prevention is a better option. If you smoke, quit now so we can all breathe a little easier.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.