



GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE LUNG DISEASE

World COPD Day: Short of Breath, Think COPD

Appropriate diagnosis of COPD can have a very significant public health impact.

For Immediate Release

In support of World COPD Day on November 19, the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), is drawing attention to the importance of correctly diagnosing COPD earlier - with the theme 'Short of Breath, Think COPD'.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a preventable and treatable condition marked by breathlessness, chronic sputum production and cough, claiming three million lives globally each year —particularly in low-resource countries — and is expected to increase due to aging populations and ongoing exposure to risks like tobacco smoke and air pollution.

Although COPD is a common, preventable, and treatable disease, extensive under-diagnosis, misdiagnosis, and late-diagnosis lead to patients receiving no treatment, incorrect treatment, or less effective treatment. Studies from across the world suggest that up to 70% of adults with COPD remain undiagnosed, with rates even higher in low and middle-income countries.^(1,2,3) Undiagnosed COPD can lead to greater symptom burden, poor quality of life, impaired work productivity, and poorer overall general health status.⁽⁴⁾

There are many factors that can lead to inappropriate or missed diagnosis, including patient-, healthcare system-, and provider-related factors. Patients may not recognize or report symptoms accurately, healthcare systems may not have resources to adequately train staff in respiratory health, or providers may have a poor understanding of COPD diagnostic criteria.

It's important for health providers to look for the following risk factors:

- Age $\geq$ 35 years
- Exposure to risk factors (tobacco smoke, household and outdoor air pollutions, occupational exposures)
- Genetic factors
- Prematurity and early life disadvantage factors
- Respiratory symptoms



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Accurate and timely diagnosis of COPD can improve quality of life and health outcomes. Based on currently available evidence, GOLD advocates for active case finding, including performing spirometry in individuals with symptoms and/or risk factors.⁽⁵⁾

Although there is currently no cure for COPD, steps to help improve diagnosis can have a positive impact on future health. Patients and families can help advocate for more research and better access to care, including routine spirometry screenings and telehealth access for patients in remote settings. In addition, providers and policy makers can work together to improve access to spirometry and advocate for its use as a general health marker in all stages of life. Health systems can work to increase academic training programs specializing in respiratory health, as well as improve training in COPD diagnostic criteria, including the use and interpretation of spirometry.

Learn more in the 2026 GOLD Report: [GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR THE DIAGNOSIS, MANAGEMENT, AND PREVENTION OF CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE \(2026 REPORT\)](#).

World COPD Day World COPD Day is an annual global initiative run by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), a member of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS). The goal of World COPD Day is to raise awareness and present new knowledge and therapeutic strategies for COPD worldwide. The 23rd annual World COPD Day will take place on November 20, 2024.

Be part of the global effort to improve the lives of people with COPD. Join World COPD Day events organized by GOLD and FIRS. Find out more [here](#).

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a preventable and treatable disease causing breathlessness, chronic sputum production, and cough. It's a leading global killer, especially prevalent in low-resource countries. Annually, COPD claims three million lives worldwide, a number projected to rise due to aging populations and continued exposure to risk factors like tobacco smoke. While tobacco smoke is a primary risk factor, COPD's complex etiology involves genetic and environmental factors, beginning in utero and progressing throughout life.

For more information about GOLD please contact Katie Langefeld at k.langefeld@goldcopd.org.

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2. Lamprecht B, Soriano JB, Studnicka M, et al. Determinants of Underdiagnosis of COPD in National and International Surveys. *Chest* 2015; **148**(4): 971-85
3. Martinez CH, Mannino DM, Jaimes FA, et al. Undiagnosed Obstructive Lung Disease in the United States. Associated Factors and Long-term Mortality. *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* 2015; **12**(12): 1788-95
4. Labonté LE, Tan WC, Li PZ, et al. Undiagnosed Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Contributes to the Burden of Health Care Use. Data from the CanCOLD Study. *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 2016; **194**(3): 285-98
5. Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD). Global Strategy for Prevention, Diagnosis and Management of COPD: 2026 Report. [2026 GOLD Report and Pocket Guide - Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease - GOLD](#)