GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE LUNG DISEASE

Early Diagnosis and Management for a Better Life

Early identification and management of COPD can have a very significant public health impact.

For Immediate Release

In support of World COPD Day on November 18, 2026, the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), is drawing attention to the importance of earlier diagnosis and treatment of CODP with the theme 'Early Diagnosis and Management for a Better Life'.

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.[1]

COPD is a common, preventable, and treatable disease, but extensive under- and misdiagnosis leads to patients receiving treatment later in the disease course. The realization that environmental factors other than tobacco smoking can contribute to COPD, that it can start early in life and affect young individuals, and that there are precursor conditions (pre-COPD, PRISm), opens new windows of opportunity for its prevention, early diagnosis, and prompt and appropriate treatment. [2]

There are many factors that can lead to delayed diagnosis of COPD, 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 to provide adequate access to spirometry within their communities, and providers may have a poor understanding of COPD diagnostic criteria.

It's important for health providers to look for the following factors that may place their adult patients at increased risk of COPD:

- Exposure to risk factors (tobacco smoke, household and outdoor air pollution, occupational exposures)
- Recurrent chest infections
- Genetic factors
- Prematurity and early life disadvantage factors
- Respiratory symptoms, including shortness of breath or chronic cough

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.[3]

In addition to earlier diagnosis, early treatment of COPD can slow disease progression, reduce symptom burden, and prevent future exacerbations. Intervention at an earlier stage, especially in symptomatic individuals or those with evidence of airflow limitation, can meaningfully improve long-term outcomes. Prompt initiation of appropriate bronchodilator therapy, smoking cessation support, and risk-factor reduction can help preserve lung function and enhance quality of life.

Although there is currently no cure for COPD, steps to help improve diagnosis and treatment 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.
- 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.
- Governments can implement measures to reduce smoking rates, decrease the use of fossil fuels to improve air quality, promote clean energy sources, encourage environmentally friendly practices, and improve access to quality healthcare for early diagnosis and treatment. [4]

GOLD will continue to work with National Leaders and other interested healthcare professionals to bring COPD to the attention of governments, public health officials, healthcare workers, and the public, to raise awareness of the burden of COPD and to develop programs for early detection, prevention and approaches to management.

Learn more in the GOLD Report: GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR THE DIAGNOSIS, MANAGEMENT, AND PREENTION 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 25th annual World COPD Day will take place on November 18, 2026.
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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