

Health Awareness

Breathing Easy, Whatever The Weather

(NAPSA)—Talking about the weather could help many Americans breathe a little easier.

Extremely warm or cool weather brings more than discomfort to the estimated 24 million people in the U.S. who may have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)—a progressive, but preventable and treatable lung condition that includes chronic bronchitis, emphysema or both. The weather can also bring a worsening of COPD symptoms.

COPD is a lung disease that makes it difficult to breathe and, over time, interferes with a person's ability to perform daily physical activities. Cigarette smoking is the most common cause of COPD, but environmental or workplace conditions may also cause the condition. Symptoms may include shortness of breath, regular coughing (sometimes with phlegm or mucus) and wheezing. Hot, humid air and an increase in ozone pollution during warm months can make the symptoms of COPD worse. In fact, studies show that people with breathing problems, including the elderly, are more likely to be hospitalized on hot, humid days.

But cold temperatures have an effect, too. Combined with strong winds during the cool months, low temperatures are known to trigger complications, as well as cause fatigue, in some people with COPD. Additionally, breathing cold, dry air shrinks the airways in some people with emphysema, making breathing more difficult.

"Extreme seasonal changes may irritate airways and cause people with COPD to experience severe symptoms, such as trouble catching their breath," said Jill Karpel, M.D., Attending Physician, North Shore University Hospital, Long Island, N.Y. "It is important for people with COPD to avoid conditions that can worsen their breathing; they should also work with their physi-



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cian to appropriately manage their condition, which may include rescue and daily medication."

COPD ranks as the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States, and is projected to become the third-leading fatal illness by the year 2020.

Patients, caregivers, physicians, family members and friends can visit www.COPDguide.com to learn more about COPD. The Web site was made possible through support from Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and Pfizer Inc.

Tips For Managing COPD During All Seasons

- Quit smoking, if you have not already done so.
- When possible, avoid conditions that make your breathing difficult. Some people find hot, humid air makes it harder to breathe, while others have a hard time with the cold.
- Follow local weather alerts for extreme temperatures and pollution.
- On high pollution days, stay inside and limit activities.
- In cold weather, wear a scarf or a cold-weather mask, and if it gets too cold or windy, do not hesitate to cover your nose.
- Use all medications and oxygen as prescribed by your doctor.

