

Data Provides Insight On Today's Face Of COPD

(NAPSA)—In 2008, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) surpassed stroke to become the third-leading cause of death in the United States. Nationwide, more than 12 million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD while millions more are unaware they may have the disease. Yet, for the serious burden COPD poses on American public health and people's quality of life, detailed nationwide data on who is most affected by this disease has been scarce.

State-Level Data

Now, the ongoing Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided for the first time an in-depth look at COPD prevalence for all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The data revealed that COPD prevalence rates vary widely across the country—from less than 4 percent of the population in Utah, Washington and Minnesota to more than 9 percent in Alabama and Kentucky. States most affected by COPD are clustered along the Ohio and lower Mississippi Rivers, with Kentucky reporting the highest percentage of residents suffering from COPD, followed by Alabama, Tennessee, Oklahoma and West Virginia.

"With many people remaining undiagnosed, this state-level data illustrates the need for increased education and awareness at the local level. It allows for more focused public health efforts and identifies audiences most at need for education and resources," said James Kiley, Ph.D., director of the Division of Lung Diseases at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health.

Signs and Symptoms

COPD describes a group of pro-



gressive respiratory conditions, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which over time make it difficult to breathe. The symptoms start slowly and signs include a chronic cough (also known as a "smoker's cough"), shortness of breath, increased phlegm production, wheezing, and not being able to take a deep breath. Currently, there is no cure for COPD but with treatment, the disease can be managed and patients can have an improved quality of life.

More women than men (6.7 percent vs. 5.2 percent) have COPD and the disease most often targets adults age 45 and older with a history of smoking, which is why it is often referred to as a smoker's disease. Yet, 24 percent of COPD patients in the U.S. have never smoked. Exposure to lung irritants and air pollutants, such as fumes, dust and secondhand smoke, may also lead to COPD. In some rare cases, COPD may be caused by a genetic predisposition known as alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency.

Two-thirds of COPD patients surveyed said that symptoms had a negative impact on their quality of life. Recognizing symptoms and getting treatment early is key to preserving quality of life and continuing to enjoy daily activities. To learn more about COPD, visit NHLBI's COPD Learn More Breathe Better® website at <http://COPD.nhlbi.nih.gov>.