

Fall 2021



# INSPIRATION COPD NEWSLETTER

Respiratory Health Association's newsletter for people living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. Protect Your Lungs This Fall
2. Get Your Fall Vaccines
3. Credit for Caring Act Would Support Family Caregivers
4. Airway Mucus 101
5. Introducing Living Better Together COPD Week

## WHAT IS COPD?

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a combination of lung damage and mucus production that makes it hard to breathe. COPD is used to describe emphysema, chronic bronchitis or a combination of the two. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, wheezing and chest tightness.



## Protect Your Lungs This Fall

As the season transitions from summer to fall, we will see more than the leaves change and cooler weather; we also expect to see a rise in respiratory viruses. People living with COPD or other lung diseases can be more susceptible to experiencing severe illness if they contract a respiratory virus. The following are a couple of the most common respiratory viruses and ways to protect yourself from them.

### The Flu:

- The flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza virus which infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It is spread through tiny droplets when infected people cough, sneeze, and talk. It can also spread when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Flu season generally runs from October to May, but timing can vary.
- Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and sore throat, and is different from a common cold in that these symptoms usually come on suddenly.
- The best way to protect yourself is to get your flu shot! You may experience mild symptoms from the flu shot—this is your body developing its response to the inactivated or weakened virus. When vaccinated people are exposed to the virus, their bodies can fight it off or reduce its impact, so only mild symptoms are experienced. High dose flu shots are available for some people 65 and older.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

## Get Your Fall Vaccines

Don't wait-  
schedule your fall  
vaccines now!

Make an appointment  
for the following  
vaccines if you are due:

- **COVID-19**  
(all over 12 years old)
- **COVID-19 booster**  
(>65 years of  
age, underlying lung  
disease,  
immunosuppressed)
- **Flu (All)**
- **Pneumococcal  
(Pneumonia)**  
(>65 years of age,  
possibly every 10 years)
- **Tdap**

## Credit for Caring Act Would Support Family Caregivers

Informal, family caregivers play an important role in the care of their loved ones. They take on many responsibilities and often learn new skills to provide better care. Juggling many roles can be challenging mentally, physically, and even financially. An AARP study found that caregivers can spend up to \$7,400 annually of their own funds on caregiving expenses.

A new federal bill, the Credit for Caring Act, proposes a \$5,000 tax credit for family caregivers to help offset the financial challenges of caregiving. The Credit for Caring Act funds may be used for caregiver training and education, home modifications, respite care, counseling, and nonmedical health supplies among other expenses. Family caregivers are integral to the care of their loved ones and as such deserve support for the important role they play. If you are interested in helping RHA advocate for this bill or other lung health legislation, please visit [resphealth.org/advocacy](https://resphealth.org/advocacy).



## Airway Mucus 101

Mucus in the airways protects your body from irritants, viruses, and pollutants. When someone has a chronic lung condition like COPD however, the airways become inflamed, and the body produces excess mucus that becomes thicker over time. So, how do you get rid of this extra mucus?

As mucus moves through your body, the final step in getting rid of it is by coughing. To have an effective cough, try following these tips:

- Stay hydrated. Drinking water can help thin out mucus.
- Practice controlled coughing: Sit down, lean forward and breathe in deeply through your nose. As you exhale, fold and press your arms across your abdomen and cough two to three times. Coughs should be short and sharp. Breathe in slowly through your nose once more. Repeat if needed.
- Talk to your doctor about medical devices and/or medications to help with your mucus build up.





## COVID-19 Booster Vaccination

For many people who received the Pfizer vaccine, booster shots are now available to increase your immune response to the COVID-19 virus. Those eligible for the booster shot include persons who are:

- 65 years and older
- Age 18+ who have underlying medical conditions, including COPD
- Age 18+ who live in long-term care settings, and
- Age 18+ who work or live in a high-risk setting.

*Both Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have submitted requests to the FDA for emergency use authorization. It is anticipated that those requests will be approved for use soon, and booster shots will become available for everyone at higher risk.*

## Protect Your Lungs This Fall (continued)

High dose vaccines contain four times as much flu virus antigen than the standard flu shot. Your doctor will help you decide which flu shot will best support your needs.

### COVID-19:

- As you probably have heard, the COVID-19 Delta variant is causing a spike in COVID-19 cases across the United States. The Delta variant has been shown to spread more easily and may cause more severe illness than previous variants in unvaccinated people. In some cases, vaccinated people have gotten the Delta variant. In these breakthrough cases, illness is typically much less severe and doesn't last as long.
- Experts are concerned about COVID-19 and the flu circulating simultaneously. There is a chance that a person could get both viruses at the same time. If you have any symptoms, contact your doctor about getting tested for COVID-19. Flu and COVID-19 have similar symptoms, so testing can help identify which virus it is.
- The best way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated. Vaccines have been shown to substantially decrease the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19. The more people that get vaccinated, the less likely it is that variants can spread throughout our communities. If you qualify for the COVID-19 booster shot, make plans to get that as soon as you can.
- If you live in an area that has a high rate of the COVID-19, you should also wear your mask indoors and in public places, especially if you are in a group that is more vulnerable to respiratory diseases. Until vaccination rates increase in the United

States, wearing a mask is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from COVID-19 variants regardless of vaccination status.

### RSV:

- Respiratory Syncytial Virus (or RSV) is a virus that can cause mild, cold-like symptoms. It is usually spread through droplets from coughs or sneezes, and it can survive on surfaces. Older adults, especially those with underlying heart or lung disease, and infants are most at risk of experiencing severe symptoms.
- Common symptoms include runny nose, decrease in appetite, fever, cough, wheezing or whistling breath, and sneezing. These symptoms can lead to other serious conditions such as pneumonia, asthma flare-ups, COPD exacerbations, congestive heart failure, etc.
- To protect yourself, make sure you and loved ones cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or elbows, wash your hands and use hand sanitizer, avoid close contact with infected people, and clean potential contaminated/high touch surfaces (like counters, doorknobs, light switches, etc.).

As respiratory viruses spread, wear your mask when you go out into public spaces and stay home if you are feeling sick. To further protect your lungs, remember to set boundaries with loved ones if they are feeling sick as well.

# INSPIRATION IS PUBLISHED BY

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This newsletter is not intended to provide specific medical advice, but general information for people living with COPD and their caregivers. If you think you may have COPD, talk to your healthcare provider.

If you would like to receive more information for people living with COPD, please visit [resphealth.org/copd](http://resphealth.org/copd).

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## CONTACT RESPIRATORY HEALTH ASSOCIATION

If you would like to have upcoming issues of our free *Inspiration* newsletter delivered to your home, please contact **Hannah Mestyanek** at **312-628-0207** or [hlestyanek@resphealth.org](mailto:hlestyanek@resphealth.org).

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## Introducing Living Better Together COPD Week

To protect the health and wellness of our COPD community, RHA has postponed the annual in-person Living Better Together COPD Conference until next year. In its place, RHA is pleased to announce Living Better Together COPD Week starting on November 15. Please join us for a selection of educational videos, Q&A webinar with a pulmonologist, and downloadable COPD resources. To view the Living Better Together COPD Week schedule of events, please visit our website [www.resphealth.org/lbt](http://www.resphealth.org/lbt).

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*THIS EDITION OF INSPIRATION IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF COPD CAREGIVER, DIANE AFRICK. THE MOTHER OF RHA'S PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, DIANE WAS A DEVOTED CAREGIVER TO HER HUSBAND AND THE PRIMARY INSPIRATION FOR RHA'S COPD CAREGIVER PROJECT.*

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