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Respiratory Health Association is a Chicago-based lung health charity focused on preventing lung disease, promoting clean air, and helping people live better through education, research, and policy change.

For more information about RHA and our work on COPD, contact:
Rachael Morkunas at **312-628-0233**
or **RMorkunas@RespHealth.org**
or visit **RespHealth.org/COPD**

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.

Inspiration is edited by Khalilah Gates, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Medical Education, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. We thank her for her assistance.

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Development Department
Respiratory Health Association
1440 West Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60607

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INSPIRATION COPD NEWSLETTER

Respiratory Health Association's newsletter for people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers.



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UNDERSTANDING PRIOR AUTHORIZATION AND COPD

If you have COPD, you may have experienced this scenario: your healthcare provider prescribes an inhaler, oxygen, pulmonary rehabilitation, or another treatment, but your insurance company requires prior authorization before it is covered.

Prior authorization means your insurance company needs additional information before approving certain medications, treatments, or services. Some plans may also require you to try another treatment first, sometimes called “step therapy.”

These requirements can be frustrating and may delay care. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has recognized that complicated prior authorization requirements and long waits for decisions can create obstacles to patient care.

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.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you're having trouble getting a COPD medication or treatment, the most important thing you can do is talk with your healthcare provider. Let them know what's happening so they can help you figure out the next step.

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Ask questions. If your insurance company says something isn't covered, ask why and what information is needed.
- Call your healthcare provider. Let them know right away if you're having trouble getting an inhaler, oxygen, pulmonary rehabilitation, or another treatment.
- Talk with your pharmacist. They can be an important resource when you are having difficulty filling a prescription. If the issue is with a prescription, your pharmacist may be able to tell you what is holding it up and what needs to happen next.
- Save your paperwork. Keep any letters or notices you receive from your insurance company. Your healthcare provider may need them.
- Don't stop or change your treatment on your own. Talk with your healthcare provider before making any changes to your COPD medications or treatment plan.



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ASK THE PROVIDER: SEASONAL VACCINATIONS

KHALILAH GATES, MD,
Northwestern Medicine



Why do vaccines matter for people with COPD?

Vaccines are an important way to protect your health. While they may not always prevent you from getting sick, they can help make illnesses less severe and lower the risk of serious complications. Infections are a common cause of COPD flare-ups. Stay up to date on vaccines for flu, COVID-19, and pneumonia to help reduce your risk of severe respiratory symptoms and hospitalization.

Do people around me need to be vaccinated if I have COPD?

Your loved ones should consider getting vaccines for their own health. Doing so will benefit you by reducing your exposure to infections.

What respiratory vaccines do you recommend?

Influenza

- All patients should receive the flu vaccine annually. Influenza vaccines in patients with COPD have been shown to reduce the number of exacerbations, the need for hospitalizations due respiratory infections, strokes and death.

Pneumococcal vaccines

- All adults age 50 or older as well as adults aged 19-49 with chronic lung disease including COPD, should consider getting pneumococcal vaccines. Studies have shown that pneumococcal vaccines provide protection against community acquired pneumonia and reduces the likelihood of COPD exacerbations.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines

- All adults over the age of 75 and adults age 50-74 with COPD should consider getting the RSV vaccines. Studies show that the vaccines (there are three, all are FDA approved) prevented RSV-related

disease and need for hospitalization after an infection.

COVID-19

- Adults over age 65 and people of any age with COPD or other chronic illnesses should consider getting COVID vaccines. COVID vaccines help protect you from severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Studies have not found an increased risk of death from COVID vaccines. One large study that followed 28 million people for four years found no evidence of worse health from vaccination and showed a lower risk of dying from COVID.

Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis)

- If you did not receive this vaccine as a child, talk with your healthcare provider about getting vaccinated. A booster may be recommended every 10 years (including ACE inhibitors).

Are there common side effects to the vaccines?

The common side effects of all vaccines are soreness, redness or swelling at injection site, low-grade fevers, muscle aches, fatigue and headaches. These side effects are usually mild and last 1-2 days. If you have had previous severe or dangerous reactions to vaccines in the past, you should discuss ALL vaccines with your provider before getting them.

Can you receive multiple vaccines at the same time?

You can get multiple vaccines at the same time, and getting COVID and flu vaccines together has been shown to be safe. Common side effects may be more noticeable with multiple vaccines, so I typically recommend no more than two at a time. If you get them separately, you generally do not need to wait more than 1-2 weeks. Try to get your annual flu and COVID vaccines by Thanksgiving to help protect yourself during holiday gatherings.

ENJOYING THE HOLIDAYS WHILE MANAGING COPD

The holiday season is a wonderful time to connect with family and friends, enjoy traditions, and create lasting memories. However, it can also bring added stress, fatigue, travel demands, and increased exposure to seasonal illnesses. With a little planning, you can enjoy the festivities while keeping your COPD symptoms under control.

MANAGE YOUR ENERGY

Holiday shopping, decorating, cooking, and social events can be physically demanding. To avoid becoming overly tired or short of breath, try to pace yourself and spread activities over several days. Focus on the traditions and events that matter most, take breaks when needed, and don't hesitate to ask family or friends for help with holiday preparations. Sitting when possible while wrapping gifts or preparing meals can also help conserve energy.

**PROTECT YOURSELF FROM
SEASONAL ILLNESSES**

Cold and flu season can present additional challenges for people living with COPD. Reduce your risk of respiratory infections by washing your hands frequently, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and staying up to date on recommended vaccinations. If you'll be attending crowded indoor events, consider wearing a mask and carrying hand sanitizer for added protection.



TRAVEL SMART

Whether you're traveling across town or across the country, preparation can make your trip less stressful. Pack all medications, including extra supplies in case of delays, and keep an updated medication list and emergency contacts with you. If you use oxygen, check travel requirements with your airline or transportation provider before your trip. It's important to also make sure you have oxygen set up at your destination as well. When traveling by car, plan regular stops to stretch, walk around, and rest.

**STAY CONSISTENT WITH YOUR
TREATMENT PLAN**

Busy schedules can make it easy to forget medications. Refill prescriptions before holiday closures, set reminders if needed, and always keep your rescue inhaler within reach. Staying on track with your treatment plan can help prevent symptoms from interrupting your holiday celebrations.

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

The holidays don't have to be perfect to be meaningful. By planning ahead, protecting your health, and listening to your body's needs, you can enjoy the season, spend quality time with loved ones, and make the most of your holiday celebrations.

JOIN US FOR THE 2026 LIVING BETTER TOGETHER® CONFERENCE!

Respiratory Health Association is excited to welcome patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and advocates to Living Better Together®, our annual COPD and chronic lung disease conference. Registration is \$30 per person, with oxygen provided on-site and complimentary bus transportation for groups of seven or more.

**Thursday, November 19, 2026 9:00 AM-3:00 PM CST.
Meridian Banquet & Conference Center |
1701 W. Algonquin Rd., Rolling Meadows, IL 60008**

The conference includes a continental breakfast, plated lunch, afternoon refreshments, an Ask the Provider session, and six expert-led breakout sessions. These sessions include:

Airway Clearance- Khalilah Gates, MD., Northwestern University

- Learn how effective airway clearance can help improve breathing, reduce coughing, and lower the risk of respiratory infections and exacerbations.

Medication Updates and Biologics- Lori Wilken, PharmD, University of Illinois Chicago

- Learn about the latest developments in COPD medication, emerging treatment approaches, the role of biologic medications and how they work to target specific types of inflammation.

Living Well with COPD- Managing Daily Life and Energy- Mae Larson, OTR/L, UW Health Swedish American Hospital

- Learn practical techniques for managing fatigue, pacing daily life activities, and prioritizing tasks to make the most of your energy throughout the day.

Diabetes and COPD- Christie Brillante, MD, University of Illinois Chicago

- Learn how diabetes and COPD can affect one another, understand why managing both conditions is important, and discover practical strategies to support your overall health.

Simple Strategies for Managing COPD and Anxiety- Kenneth Schwiesow, RN, RT, Northwestern Medicine

- Learn the connection between COPD and anxiety and discover practical tools that will help improve emotional well-being and quality of life while living with COPD.

Tai Chi- Dennis Newport

- Learn how Tai Chi can be used to help with better breathing control, increase strength, improve endurance and lower stress levels.



VACCINES FOR ALL!

We are excited to partner with Walgreens to offer convenient on-site vaccinations at the conference. Attendees can learn about recommended vaccines, ask questions, and receive eligible vaccines, including flu, RSV, COVID-19, and more.