

**What Is Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)?**

COPD is the name for a group of diseases that restrict air flow and cause trouble breathing. COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Chronic lower respiratory disease, including COPD, is the third leading cause of death in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Fifteen million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD.<sup>2</sup> Two decades ago, more than 50% of adults with poor pulmonary function were not aware that they had COPD, therefore millions more may have it.<sup>3</sup>

**Symptoms**

- Chronic cough (also known as smoker’s cough).
- Chronic phlegm production.
- Shortness of breath while doing things you used to be able to do.
- Not being able to take a deep breath.
- Wheezing.

**Causes**

Tobacco use is the primary cause of COPD in the United States, but air pollutants at home (such as secondhand smoke and some heating fuels) and at work (such as dusts, gases, and fumes), and genetic predisposition also can cause COPD.

**Prevention and Treatment**

For current smokers, smoking cessation is essential for preventing COPD. Eliminating exposure to tobacco smoke and other environmental pollutants is also important. While there is no cure for COPD, treatment is available to manage the symptoms that are caused by COPD and improve quality of life. Treatment options include medication (such as inhalers), pulmonary rehabilitation, physical activity training, and oxygen treatment.

1. Kochanek KD, Xu J, Murphy SL, Miniño AM, Kung HC. Deaths: final data for 2009. *Nat Vital Stat Rep.* 2012; 60(3): 1-117.  
 2. CDC. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among adults—United States, 2011. *MMWR.* 2012; 61(46):938-943.  
 3. Mannino DM, Gagnon RC, Petty TL, Lydick E. Obstructive lung disease and low lung function in adults in the United States: data from the National health care and Nutrition Examination Survey 1988-1994. *Arch Intern Med.* 2000;160:1683-1689.

**COPD Risk Factors**

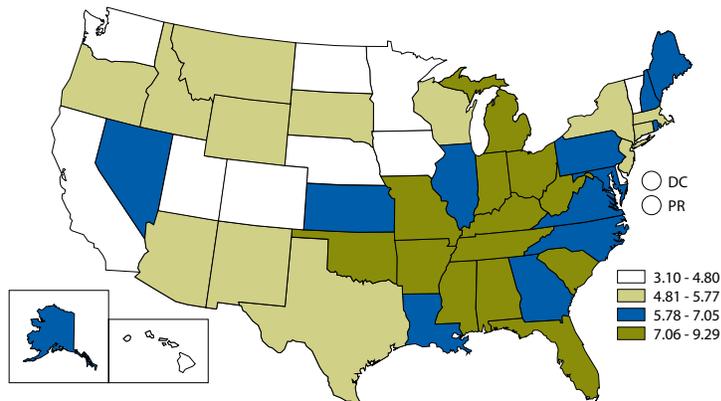
You may be at an increased risk if you are older than 40 years and

- Have symptoms of COPD.
- Have a history of smoking.
- Have been exposed to environmental or occupational pollutants.

Please talk with your health care provider about being tested for COPD using spirometry (a breathing test).

About 5.3% (age-adjusted = 5.9%) of Alaska residents surveyed in 2011 reported having been told by a health care professional that they have COPD. The map below depicts quartiles of the national prevalence of COPD by state for comparison.

**Age-Adjusted† Percentage of U.S. Adults with COPD by State or Territory, 2011\***



†Age-adjusted to the 2000 U.S. standard population.  
 \*Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) for 2011.

**COPD Learn More Breathe Better®**

Find more information about COPD and its treatment is available at [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/). Type COPD in the search box or visit the COPD Learn More Breathe Better® Campaign, at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/copd/](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/copd/)

**Other resources:**

- [www.copdfoundation.org/](http://www.copdfoundation.org/)
- [www.thoracic.org/clinical/copd-guidelines/index.php](http://www.thoracic.org/clinical/copd-guidelines/index.php)
- [www.goldcopd.org/](http://www.goldcopd.org/)



The table to the right breaks down the prevalence of COPD among Alaska adults by age, race/ethnicity, sex, employment status, education level, income, marital status, smoking status, and asthma history.

Respondents were more likely to report COPD ( $p < 0.05$ ) if they

- Had a household income  $< \$25,000$ .
- Were divorced, widowed, or separated.
- Had a history of smoking (current or former smoker).
- Had a history of asthma.

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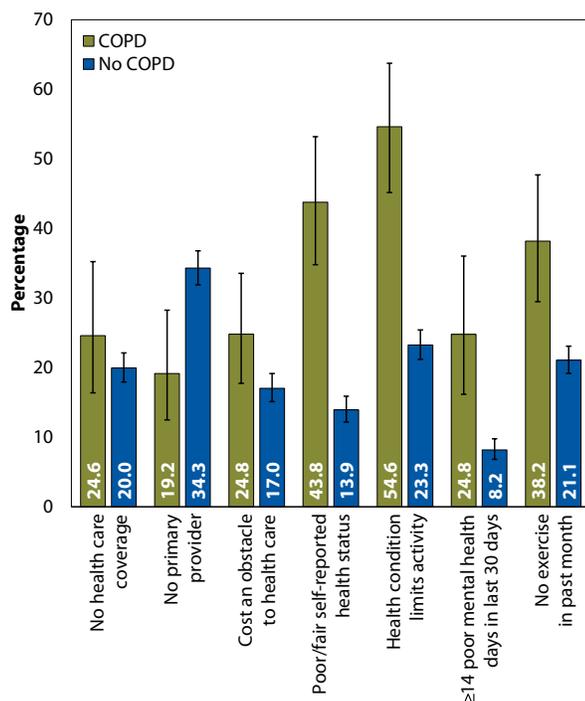
- Were employed.
- Had never smoked.
- Had no history of asthma.

The figure below compares health and health care characteristics by COPD status.

Compared with adults without COPD, adults with COPD were more likely ( $p < 0.05$ ) to report

- They had a primary health care provider.
- Poor/fair health status.
- A health condition limited activity.
- Fourteen or more poor mental health days in the past 30 days.
- No exercise in the past month.

### Health and Healthcare Characteristics by COPD Status: Alaska



### Percentage of Alaska Adults with COPD, 2011 BRFSS\*, n=3,508

Characteristic	%	95% CI
<b>Age Group (Years)</b>		
18–44	2.7	(1.7–4.1)
45–54	5.6	(3.8–8.2)
55–64	6.8	(5.0–9.3)
65–74	12.1	(8.7–16.5)
$\geq 75$	19.4	(10.9–31.9)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	5.1	(4.1–6.3)
Black	**	—
Hispanic	**	—
Other	7.1	(4.9–10.2)
<b>Sex</b>		
Men	6.1	(4.7–8.0)
Women	4.3	(3.4–5.5)
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	2.4	(1.8–3.4)
Unemployed	8.3	(4.7–14.3)
Homemaker/Student	**	—
Retired	13.8	(9.8–19.0)
Unable to work	20.1	(13.6–28.7)
<b>Education Level</b>		
Less than High School Diploma	9.6	(5.7–15.7)
High School Diploma or GED	6.3	(4.5–8.7)
At least Some College	4.0	(3.2–5.1)
<b>Income</b>		
$< \$25,000$	10.9	(8.3–14.1)
$\$25,000–\$49,999$	3.8	(2.4–5.9)
$\$50,000–\$74,999$	4.1	(2.4–6.9)
$> \$75,000+$	2.8	(1.7–4.5)
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	3.2	(2.4–4.4)
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	13.6	(10.4–17.5)
Never Married	2.9	(1.7–5.0)
Member of Unmarried Couple	**	—
<b>Smoking Status</b>		
Current	9.4	(7.1–12.3)
Former	7.1	(5.2–9.5)
Never	2.4	(1.6–3.7)
<b>Ever Had Asthma</b>		
Yes	14.0	(10.4–18.5)
No	3.9	(3.0–4.9)

\*BRFSS for 2011. Respondents were asked, "Have you ever been told by a doctor or health professional that you have COPD, emphysema, or chronic bronchitis?"

\*\*Relative standard error  $\geq 0.3$ . Learn more about BRFSS methodology at [www.cdc.gov/BRFSS](http://www.cdc.gov/BRFSS).