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TAKE THE TEST: COULD YOU BE AT RISK FOR COPD? EARLY INTERVENTION HELPS.

MORGANTOWN, WV – (NOVEMBER 6, 2017)

Nearly 9 percent of West Virginians have been told by a physician that they have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That figure is among the highest in the country, only lower than Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee.

November is National COPD Awareness Month. As cold weather approaches, it’s a good time for people to assess if they have COPD, the name for a group of diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis that restrict air flow and make breathing difficult.

Fifteen million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD, according to the CDC. Two decades ago, more than 50 percent of adults with poor pulmonary function were not aware they had COPD. Because early diagnosis and treatment—which can include medication and exercise—can keep symptoms from worsening faster, it’s important for anyone who might be concerned they have COPD to see a doctor.

COPD can be detected through a simple test called spirometry. Out of 519 West Virginians with COPD, 75.6 percent of them reported being diagnosed through spirometry. Of that same group, 55.1 percent of them reported using at least one COPD medication daily and 25.7 percent of them reported a hospital or emergency department visit because of their COPD. And 70.7 percent of them said the shortness of breath affected their quality of life.

Risk factors for COPD include being a former or current smoker. Also, exposure to harmful lung irritants over a long period of time, including secondhand smoke, some heating fuels and workplace dust, as well as a history of COPD in the family, can also be factors.

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Symptoms include a chronic cough, also known as a smoker’s cough. Other symptoms include chronic phlegm production, shortness of breath when doing things you used to be able to do easily, not being able to take a deep breath and wheezing.

Many adults are incorrectly diagnosed with asthma. The proper diagnosis allows those with COPD to get the right treatment as well as follow-up monitoring. There is no cure for COPD, but treatments are available that can help people with COPD get through the day with less wheezing and instead doing activities they enjoy.

Those who are on the fence about getting tested can go to the COPD Foundation’s website and take a short and easy screener quiz at www.copdfoundation.org/Screener. This can gauge the probability of having COPD. The quiz asks lifestyle and health questions and assigns them a rate. A five or above could mean the test taker has COPD.

For more information on COPD, check out cdc.gov/copd/index.html and copdfoundation.org.