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**New Survey Suggests Growing Awareness of COPD, Nation's Fourth Leading Killer**  
Understanding of the Disease and its Risk Factors, Including Smoking, Remains Low

Awareness of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is growing, but few Americans have a thorough understanding of the disease, according to a new national survey released today. The new data show that 64 percent of survey respondents had heard of COPD, compared with 49 percent in a 2004 survey. Among those who reported hearing of COPD, only half recognized the disease as a leading cause of death, and just 44 percent understood it to be treatable.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health analyzed results from the annual HealthStyles survey of American public health attitudes, knowledge, practices, and lifestyle habits, conducted each summer by Porter Novelli.

The fourth leading cause of death in the United States, COPD is a serious lung disease affecting an estimated 24 million Americans. More than 12 million people are currently diagnosed with COPD and another 12 million may have COPD but remain undiagnosed despite recognizable symptoms. COPD typically affects people over 45, especially those who smoke or have smoked, and those with risk factors associated with genetics or environmental exposures. Symptoms include chronic cough, sometimes called "smoker's cough," shortness of breath, wheezing, not being able to take a deep breath, and excess sputum production.

"We are encouraged that people are becoming more aware of the term COPD," said Elizabeth G. Nabel, M.D., director, NHLBI. "But the survey also indicates that we as a public health community have much more work to do to promote greater understanding of the disease, its symptoms, and risk factors, so that we can improve rates of diagnosis and treatment."

While 74 percent of survey respondents correctly identified shortness of breath as a symptom of COPD, only 5 percent recognized chronic cough as a symptom of the disease. Smoking is attributed to as many as 9 out of ten COPD-related deaths, yet most survey respondents - 66 percent - did not recognize smoking as a risk factor. This was especially true among the current smokers surveyed. Just 22 percent recognized that their smoking puts them at greater risk for COPD.

"This is perhaps the most distressing information that the survey has brought to light," said James P. Kiley, Ph.D., director of the Division of Lung Diseases, NHLBI. "While we applaud the millions of Americans who have heeded the public health community's call to quit

smoking, it's important that both current and former smokers know that they remain at risk for COPD.”

COPD can be diagnosed with a simple breathing test called spirometry. Those at risk for COPD as well as those experiencing symptoms should talk to their doctor about the test. Spirometry is not invasive and can be conducted in the doctor's office. It involves breathing out as hard and fast as possible into a tube connected to a machine that measures lung function.

HealthStyles questionnaires were mailed in early summer of 2008 to a nationwide sample of 8,200 adults 18 years of age and older. The results represent a sample of 5,399 households. The 2004 survey of COPD awareness was conducted by the National Women's Health Resource Center and Russell Marketing Research. That survey was fielded in March, 2004 among 1,554 adults across the United States.

For those diagnosed with COPD, many treatments are available to reduce symptoms, improve breathing, and help patients get back to doing activities they used to do.

NHLBI launched the COPD Learn More Breathe Better campaign in 2007 to increase awareness and understanding of COPD and its risk factors, and to underscore the benefits of early detection and treatment in slowing the disease and improving quality of life. The campaign is supported by more than 20 organizations including leading medical professional societies, patient advocacy groups, and corporate partners in facilitating this public health initiative.

November is National COPD Awareness Month. Sponsored by the U.S. COPD Coalition, the observance is a time for organizations and communities across the country to increase the overall awareness of COPD. The COPD Learn More Breathe Better campaign is pleased to support 'Learn About COPD Days', November 13-16, 2008, in honor of COPD Awareness Month.

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For more information on COPD, visit: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/copd/> or [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Copd/Copd\\_WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Copd/Copd_WhatIs.html)

NHLBI plans, conducts, and supports research related to the causes, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart, blood vessel, lung, and blood diseases; and sleep disorders. The Institute also administers national health education campaigns on COPD, women and heart disease, healthy weight for children, and other topics. NHLBI press releases and other materials are available online at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

The National Institutes of Health — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).