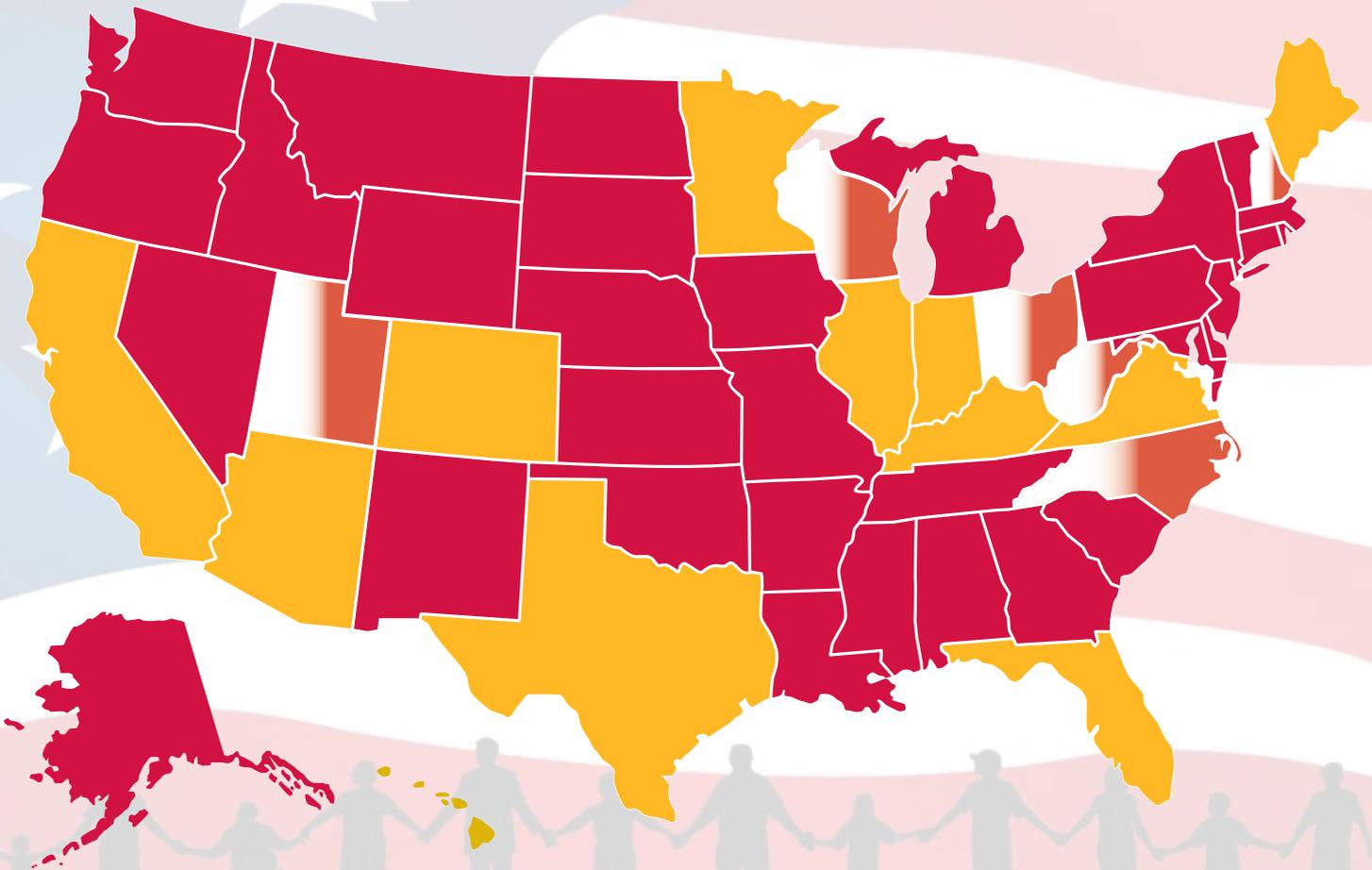


# COPD

D I G E S T

RELEVANT RESOURCES, RESEARCH, REPORTS, AND INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE



## Activism in the States *Page 17*

- GOLD**  
States who have held summits or are preparing one.
- STRIPED**  
States who are working to begin building a coalition and summit.
- MAROON**  
States remaining who haven't mobilized.

Change, But How Much?

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Tips for Oxygen Users

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# Cold Weather Hazards



**F**all and winter can be special, beautiful seasons: long walks on a chilly afternoon through a forest of falling leaves, family holiday gatherings, frost on the windows, snow covered fields, frozen lakes, sledding, snow angels, warming by the fireplace, short cold days, and long, colder nights. To enjoy the blessings of fall and winter as much as other seasons, people with COPD must properly protect themselves against the hazards of cold weather. If they do not take proper precautions, then fall and winter can become seasons of dread, filled with endless days and nights of unhealthy, self-imposed indoor confinement while the rest of the world goes about its normal daily activities.

One of the major winter hazards for individuals with respiratory problems is that when you are outdoors, the air you must breathe will often be much colder than your body likes. Unfortunately, for many people with COPD, breathing cold air causes bronchospasm and increases breathlessness—a distressing and frightening experience. This upsetting experience often results in a person avoiding normal outdoor errands and activities, which

in turn leads to a decrease in activity. After a while, this lack of activity causes deterioration in physical conditioning and increased disability and impairment. As a result, the impact this deconditioning and disability has on a person's everyday life can be disastrous, as it leads not only to a loss of fitness and energy but also a loss of self-confidence, a feeling of social isolation, and depression (Booker, 2005).

Knowing how to manage your symptoms and protect against breathing cold air in the winter can help prevent serious breathing problems, like exacerbations. Studies show that exacerbations are particularly common in the winter months causing a significant rise in COPD (hospital) admissions, usually peaking in late December and early January (Bird, 2006). As a matter of fact, according to Dr. Krishna B. Sharma, exacerbations are the number one reason COPD patients are seen in the family doctor's office, emergency room, and hospital ward. These exacerbation events are not only painful and taxing to the daily lives of people with COPD (Barnett, 2006a), but they will most likely cause a permanent decline in their quality of health (Donaldson, 2002).

The common cold or other forms of respiratory tract infections may also be potentially serious for the COPD patient. Many respiratory tract infections are contagious and are often spread by simple contact between people. During the winter, the incidence of the common cold and upper respiratory tract infections is much higher than during other times of the year.

## What Can You Do?

For a person with COPD, it is important to make every effort to maintain a healthy lifestyle and enjoy the things you like to do. Going about life with purpose and pleasure is an important ingredient to your well-being and to the management of your health. The cold weather season is no different. Unfortunately, an all too common mistake that people with COPD make during this time period is to let their physical and emotional health deteriorate through the reduction of activity and exercise. To keep active outside during fall and winter, however, people

with COPD must be extra cautious in dressing appropriately for cold temperatures.

Appropriate insulated winter clothing is a must! Keeping your head and face warm is extremely important. Even during short exposures, like going outside to bring in the mail or waiting for your car to warm up, your body can lose a lot of heat and energy if it is not properly protected. Unfortunately, even short exposures to cold when not properly prepared, can stimulate a number of negative physiological changes to your body that can cause significant stress. Surprisingly enough, research has found that blood pressure can increase and contribute to shortness of breath.

You should have annual flu and pneumonia vaccinations and take extra precautions to avoid exposure to possible contaminants. One of the simplest things you can do to protect from catching a cold is to wash your hands regularly. Avoiding contact with people who are suffering from a cold also will greatly reduce your risks. Drinking lots of fluids is particularly beneficial during cold weather; a properly hydrated body can better defend against infections and the typical common cold virus.

One way to help improve comfort during cold exposure is to wear a facemask designed

to warm the air you breathe. COPD patients can benefit from using a facemask during fall and winter exposures to cold air, as it will help them enjoy advanced protection against cold weather hazards. Take charge and protect yourself from the coming winter! ■

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- Booker R (2005) "Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and the NICE guideline." Nursing Standard. 19 ;22: 43-52. British Thoracic Society (2001) "Pulmonary Rehabilitation". Thorax. 56;11: 827-834.
- Donaldson GC, Seemungal TA, Wedzicha JA et al (2002) "Relationships between exacerbation frequency and lung function decline in Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease." Thorax. 57;10: 847-852.

**Winter To-Do List:**

- Have annual flu and pneumonia vaccinations
- Exercise at the appropriate level directed by your physician
- Dress properly when going out in cold weather
- Cover your head and face during outings
- Wash your hands regularly
- Avoid contact with people suffering from cold symptoms
- Drink lots of fluids

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