

COPD Exacerbations: How to Protect Yourself This Winter

For people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, winter can be one of the most difficult times of the year.

COPD is a progressive lung disease that causes inflammation in the airways and makes breathing increasingly difficult. COPD exacerbations increase during the winter due to cold weather, more time spent indoors and seasonal respiratory infections.



Why Winter Increases Risk

Respiratory infections are the most common cause of COPD exacerbations. The risk increases during the winter as more people gather indoors and flu season reaches its peak. This year's flu season is the most severe in more than a decade, making prevention especially important. Getting immunized against the flu remains one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of serious illness.



Reducing Triggers for COPD

Managing COPD in winter starts with awareness. Common triggers include:



Smoke from fireplaces and wood stoves



Harsh cleaning products



Scented candles



Freezing outdoor temperatures

Advocating for Greater Awareness & Reducing Barriers

People with COPD can take steps to protect their health in colder months, but stronger policy leadership is essential. Policymakers, clinicians and advocacy organizations can help protect the 30 million people living with COPD year-round by:



Advancing the COPD National Action Plan.



Supporting research and education.



Reducing barriers to innovative treatments and affordable care.

Planning Ahead

Winter travel and busy schedules require extra preparation.

- ✓ Bring more medication than you expect to need.
- ✓ Store inhalers properly so they do not freeze.
- ✓ Take frequent breaks to warm up when driving.

With preparation, self-advocacy and clear federal and state action, the COPD community can improve early diagnosis, strengthen prevention and establish accountability for real progress, so COPD finally becomes the national health priority it should be.