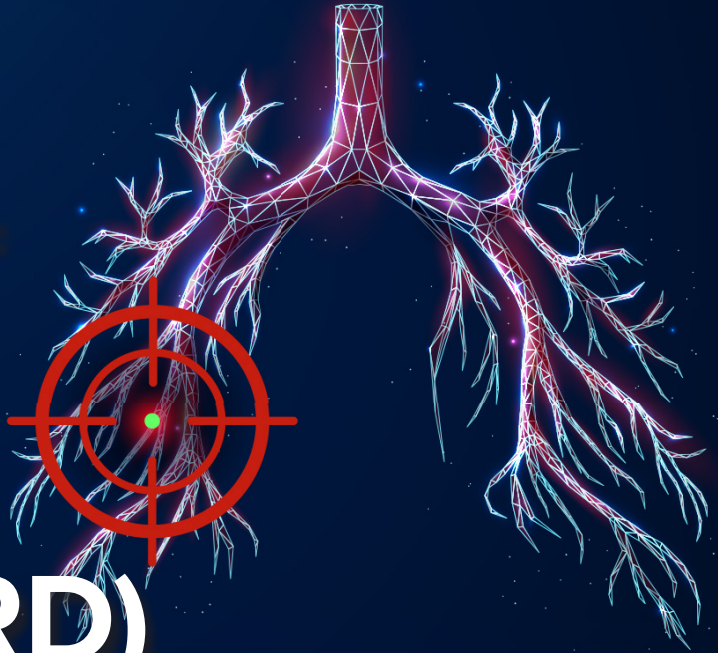




LUNG HEALTH & BEYOND:

Chronic Respiratory Diseases (CRD)



In 2019, over 454 million people worldwide reported having a chronic respiratory disease (CRD), such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or asthma. The lethality of CRDs is significant, resulting in over 4 million deaths annually. CRDs represent the third leading cause of death globally.

Chronic Respiratory Diseases (CRDs) are often aggravated by smoking and environmental factors. However, CRDs can also be genetic, making them partly beyond an individual's control. Common CRDs include:

Asthma: Asthma causes swelling and excess mucus production, leading to narrowed airways. This serious health condition affects more than 25 million Americans, including over 5 million children. If left untreated, asthma can be fatal.

Asthma presents in different forms, each with various causes and treatments. Intermittent asthma occurs

occasionally, while chronic asthma produces consistent symptoms. Some people are born with asthma, while others develop it over time due to environmental exposures.

Asthma symptoms, often referred to as asthma attacks, can be triggered by factors such as allergies, exercise, weather conditions, or stress.

Identifying the following three asthma symptoms can be lifesaving:

- Inflammation of the lining of the airways
- Thick mucus blocking airways
- Bronchospasms (when muscles in the airways tighten)

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD):

There are various forms of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD). These diseases all have different mechanisms but lead to a similar outcome: irreversible lung and airway damage that blocks the airways and makes breathing difficult.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, COPD blocks airways by:

- Thickening mucus settling in the airways
- Reducing elasticity in the airways and air sacs in the lungs
- Damaging the walls between air sacs in the lungs



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- Causing inflammation in the airways
- Scarring and narrowing the airways

People with COPD may experience worsening symptoms, known as exacerbations. These exacerbations tend to worsen over time, resulting in extremely difficult and laborious breathing.

Some COPD cases are genetic, caused by a disorder called alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency. Other cases are triggered by environmental factors, such as exposure to air pollution, cigarette or vape smoke, dust, fumes, and other toxic pollutants.

Treatment options for COPD include prescription medication, oxygen therapy, and pulmonary rehabilitation, which help strengthen the lungs.

Pneumonia: Approximately 55,000 people die from pneumonia in the U.S. each year, making it one of the leading causes of death in developing countries. Pneumonia causes fluid

buildup in the lungs, which makes breathing extremely painful.

Pneumonia affects people of all ages. However, individuals with underlying lung conditions, such as asthma or COPD, are at a higher risk of developing the disease. People with heart disease, certain neurological conditions, and those over the age of 65 are also at an increased risk of developing pneumonia. Additionally, children younger than two, pregnant individuals, and those who are immunocompromised are at a higher risk.

There are two main types of pneumonia: bacterial and viral. While bacteria and viruses are the most common causes, fungi and protozoa can also cause pneumonia. Symptoms may vary depending on the type of pneumonia.

Early diagnosis and treatment are essential to manage pneumonia and prevent serious complications. If you have a lingering cold or are at increased

PNEUMONIA

The two main types include:


BACTERIAL:

Rapid heart rate, high fever, fatigue, discolored or bloody mucus with coughing, and a blue tinge to the lips, skin, or nails.

VIRAL:

Headache, body aches, fatigue, and a dry cough.

risk for developing pneumonia, seek medical attention immediately.

Consult with your primary care physician (PCP) if you are concerned for being at-risk. If you don't have a PCP, you may call the Customer Service number on your BCBSIL member ID card or [log on to Blue Access for MembersSM \(BAMSM\)](#)  [bcbsil.com](#). There, you can use the **Provider Finder** tool, a quick and user-friendly way to locate in-network healthcare providers.



SOURCES: [Lung.org](#), [TheLancet.com](#), [Clevelandclinic.org](#)

THE INVISIBLE WEIGHT: MENTAL IMPACT OF LIVING WITH LUNG DISEASES

Serious health conditions like asthma and COPD can be tough to manage, but people who have these conditions often manage mental health concerns as well. The mental weight of having a condition that can suddenly make it difficult or even impossible to breathe may be jarring. It can cause worrying and anxiety, as well as increase your risk for depression.

This mental and emotional strain isn't limited to lung diseases, nor is it uncommon—it's a normal part of the mind-body connection. The mind-body connection highlights how wellbeing in one aspect of health can impact other areas. For example, with COPD and similar lung conditions, the decline in physical health often takes a toll on mental and emotional wellbeing. Similarly, mental and emotional challenges can manifest as physical symptoms, creating a cycle of interrelated health effects.

If you're noticing your lung condition is interfering with your mental and emotional wellbeing, don't let it worsen unchecked. Seek support from a mental health professional who understands the challenges of having a serious chronic illness. You might even benefit from a support group consisting of people who face similar health concerns.

Need help finding mental and emotional support? You can find a therapist, support group, and other types of mental health support using ComPsych EAP. Visit **GuidanceResources® Online** at [www.guidanceresources.com](#) and enter **Web ID: BCBSILEAP**.

