

## COPD SCREENING DONE IN WELKOM

November 30, 2012



Take deep breaths ... Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease can be tested with a spirometry which tests the lungs' capacity

About 125 of the 23 percent of South Africans who smoke die from the habit every day, the Free State department of health has revealed.

The department together with Vital Aire preached the “stop smoking and do not start” message when they conducted a number of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) screenings around the province which ended in Thabong in Welkom last week.

“Smoking is the leading cause of COPD. The more a person smokes, the more likely that person will develop COPD. Other risk factors include exposure to certain gases or fumes in the workplace, exposure to heavy amounts of second hand smoke and pollution and frequent use of cooking fire without proper ventilation,” explained Teboho Mabesa of the department of health.

COPD is the leading cause of death and illness worldwide. It is a progressive disease which refers to a group of lung diseases that block airflow as a person exhales and makes it increasingly difficult to breath. It is a condition in which the lungs have become permanently damaged and the airways are constantly narrowed.

“Progressive’ means that the disease gets worse with time, and that it is not reversible. A person with COPD has less air flowing into and out of the airways,” added Mabesa.

Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are the two main conditions that make up COPD. With emphysema the walls between many air sacs lose their shape and become floppy, which destroys the air sacs. This leads to decreased amounts of air exchange in the lungs.

With chronic bronchitis, the lining of the airways is constantly irritated and inflamed, and becomes thickened. Mucus then forms in the airways, making it hard to breathe.

# The Weekly

The best test for COPD is a lung function test called spirometry. This involves blowing out as hard as possible into a small machine that tests lung capacity. The results can be checked right away, and the test does not involve exercising, drawing blood, or exposure to radiation.

“Using a stethoscope to listen to the lungs can also be helpful. However, sometimes the lungs sound normal even when COPD is present,” said Mabesa.

Since the damage to the lungs cannot be reversed, treatment focuses on controlling symptoms and minimising further damage.

“There is no cure for COPD. The goals of treatment are changing the lifestyle of the patient and slowing the progress of the disease,” explained Loraine Kunene, of Vital Aire.

Kunene said COPD had increased drastically over the past two years since the number of female smokers has increased as well as the forms of smoking.

“These days people begin smoking earlier and there is no longer a difference between males and females when it comes to smoking. There is also an alarming increase of tobacco smoking, marijuana and hookah smoking.

“There is approximately 12mg of nicotine in one cigarette and an average smoker inhales approximately 1mg. One puff on a hookah pipe may be equivalent to 20 cigarettes and one puff of marijuana may be equivalent to 50 cigarettes,” Kunene added.

The signs and symptoms people can look out for are a chronic cough and sputum production, difficulty in breathing (dyspnea) during routine activities such as walking, cooking and tending to personal hygiene; chest tightness; prolonged expiration (exhalation); wheezing and enlargement of the chest, particularly front to back.

[Source: [www.theweekly.co.za](http://www.theweekly.co.za)]