

BREATHING *matters*

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ISOLATION AND CHRONIC ILLNESS: YOU'RE NOT ALONE

An Interview with Rev. Barbara Brawley, M. Div., CAGS

From your perspective please share how the current COVID-19 pandemic has affected people living with chronic conditions?

Overall there's an even greater sense of isolation; of being alone and feeling anxious and depressed. Generally, people are experiencing more feelings of fear and vulnerability. It's important now more than ever to reach out to friends and family and stay connected.

There's also an incredible sense of loss. Not being able to do the things we normally enjoy, getting together with others, especially not being able to do simple things like run errands. Many people have to rely on others for help and that is hard. However, there is also an opportunity to learn new things. For example, technology has really helped reduce feelings of isolation. Yes, it can be difficult and some people are intimidated by it. Yet, throughout our lives we constantly have had to learn new things and adapt. It's being open to learning new things that can be the real challenge.

We know that many people have not left their homes since last March, especially those that are high risk, such as those living with chronic lung disease. What advice or support would you offer to address their fears?

Yes. The fear of not being able to help ourselves and being dependent on others is scary. It's a tough time and we're all vulnerable (even those that are not living with chronic conditions). Remember in the cycle of anxiety to pause – use deep breathing and calming techniques (listening to calm music), staying distracted from your thoughts and doing hobbies, taking care of yourself and focus on what you can do rather than what you cannot. For example, can you do one thing? Break it down by making it more manageable. It's so important to keep yourself moving with simple and safe exercises (chair exercises while watching TV or a movie are helpful).

What tips or advice do you have for people that may live alone or are feeling isolated?

Be proactive. It's up to us when we feel alone. Lean on friends, family or even your faith community. It's crucial to get away from sitting with our thoughts – often may lead to negative feelings. Are there hobbies you enjoy – even small things will provide a sense of accomplishment. Read a chapter in a book. Meditate for a few minutes. Picture in your mind a favorite place you have visited or imagine where you would like to go. Going through photo albums of happy memories or when it's not bitter cold outside sitting on a porch for a few minutes of fresh air. Both can do wonders to lift our spirits.

As we start off 2021, what would you recommend for people to reset or restart a routine that may have been lost during the pandemic?

Start small and slowly. It takes time to build routines and stay consistent. It's been a tough year, be gentle with yourself. Reflect on what did help you get through this challenging time and set small goals for the future. Look forward – there is a sense of hopeful anticipation now with the vaccines. Think about what is something you would like to do in the future, being mindful of starting small, slowly and safely.

Please share any resources or books that may be beneficial for people to cope?

Hospital newsletters and websites have great information. Also, checking out what resources may be available locally, such as senior and community centers, libraries and even listening to audio books. There are so many options out there, and you will find something that works best for you.

Anything else you wish to share?

You're not alone. Our feelings are valid and most likely others have had similar feelings this past year. When we feel vulnerable, that's when we need to reach out to others. Stay connected. Sometimes you have to push yourself out of your comfort zone (exercise on our own, asking for help, being proactive). We will return to a sense of normalcy eventually. Feel positive that you made it through 2020. Acknowledge your feelings and give yourself grace.



Rev. Barbara A. Brawley has been a chaplain at the Elliot Hospital since 1993. She received her B.A. degree in Psychology from Rivier University in 1986, her M.

Div. from Boston University in 1992 and a Certificate of Advance Degree (CAGS) in Mental Health Counseling in 2013. She facilitates the Ethics and the Psychological Implications of Chronic Illness classes in the Pulmonary Rehab. She enjoys music, reading, the ocean and most especially, her cat Autumn.



COVID-19 VACCINES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

As the vaccines continue to become more widely available to the public this winter and into the spring here are answers to common questions.

Q: Can I get infected from the vaccine?

A: No. There is no virus in the injection so you cannot get COVID-19 from getting the vaccine.

Q: How effective are these vaccines?

A: Every vaccine trial has two groups of people – one who gets the vaccine and one who doesn't (they get a placebo). Then they count up who gets sick. For example, in the Pfizer trials 18,000 people received the vaccine: 8 got COVID-19. Another 18,000 got the placebo: 162 got COVID-19. There were similar trials done with the Moderna vaccine. This is great news and why so many that work in health care were lining up to get these vaccines as soon as they became available at the end of 2020.

Q: Why did the vaccines happen so fast? Isn't that dangerous?

A: This is the fastest vaccine development in history because years of science and research went on before this and then a lot of good things happened all at once. Here's a few of those reasons:

- a) Because scientists have been studying other coronaviruses behind the scenes for years;
- b) Because scientists have been studying mRNA vaccines for years;
- c) Because there was so much coronavirus around and it's so contagious that trials could finish up quickly;
- d) Because the government, industry and a lot of charitable organizations invested in this research;
- e) Vaccine distribution has been worked on for months behind the scenes.

Q: Don't scientists need more time to study these vaccines to be sure they're safe and effective?

A: No. The trials that took place were set up to accumulate a certain number of people and cases of COVID-19. Independent statisticians monitored the numbers throughout the study.

Q: Do I have to get both shots?

A: Yes, The vaccines are about 50% effective after the first shot; then 95% effective after the second dose.

Q: Am I safe the day after the first shot?

A: No. It takes a while. However, you are safe about a week or two after the second dose.

Q: Can I stop wearing masks once I have the second dose of the vaccine?

A: No, not yet unfortunately. We don't know yet about transmission. Could you get vaccinated, get infected anyways, stay asymptomatic and then accidentally pass it along to others? Possibly. Since we don't know yet how often that happens, we need to continue to mask up.

Q: What about children?

A: Kids weren't studied in the Pfizer/Moderna trials, and they're never studied early on, they always test adults first. There may be data later in 2021. In the meantime, vaccinate their teachers and the kids will be safer.

For more information: Contact 2-1-1 and visit [nh.gov/COVID19](https://www.nh.gov/COVID19)

Source: Robin Schoenthaler, MD at Massachusetts General Hospital

Teen Vaping: The Latest Trend of Disposable Devices



Vaping and the impact on youth and young people remains a public health concern. Findings from the 2020 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) from January 16 – March 16, 2020, in 180 schools showed a “sharp decline in youth e-cigarette use since last year. However, the number of current youth e-cig users remains concerningly high.” With the emergence of COVID-19, this study was limited in the length of time and number of schools participating.

As the vaping environment continually evolves, so have the device options for teen vapers. Young people have shifted away from JUUL and similar pod style devices that were popular the past few years and moved on to the ever increasing options available in the “disposable vape” category.

Following increased scrutiny of JUUL and similar pod style vape products and their marketing campaigns, new, more affordable, “disposable vapes” continue to emerge in this market. These devices are not covered by the FDA flavor ban that took effect in February 2020. Simpler in design, these devices are pre-charged, affordable, on sale for as little as \$3.99 each and filled with an array of nicotine salt solutions in fruity, sweet kid-friendly flavors. These vapes offer 200-300 hits of nicotine before the device is thrown away. Many times they are sold with a solution higher in nicotine content than a pack or more of cigarettes. One product website suggests: “After the ban on flavored vape pods happened, disposable vapes or disposable e-cigs became the next best option in 2020 for those after ultimate convenience”.

Disposable e-cigarette use by high school students reached 26.5% in 2020 compared to 2.4% in 2019. A similar trend was also seen with middle school student use (2020 NYTS).

Despite the flavor ban last year, the FDA believes that youth use of e-cigarettes remains a public health crisis affecting children, families, schools and communities. We agree with the FDA and as an organization are compelled to share information about the health impact of using nicotine products, especially among youth. Unfortunately, vape devices remain accessible to young people in a variety of retail locations throughout the state and online. The potential for nicotine addiction at a young age and the possibility for damage to the developing brain and lungs is even greater for teens and young adults.

Breathe NH continues to offer our **Vaping Unveiled™** education program at no cost to schools. As many schools are in Remote Learning, the program content and format were adapted to meet the needs of both students and teachers. Virtual programs have been presented to middle school and high school students, parents, school staff and community prevention groups throughout the state over the past several months.

For more information contact: 603-669-2411 or info@BreatheNH.org, or visit [BreatheNH.org/programs/vaping-unveiled](https://www.BreatheNH.org/programs/vaping-unveiled).

2020 NH LEGISLATIVE SESSION TOBACCO-RELATED HIGHLIGHTS

- **July 1, 2020:** The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health Services (DPHS), announced updated administrative rules related to the Indoor Smoking Act. The rules were amended as a result of legislative changes to include the use of e-cigarettes and devices in the Indoor Smoking Act’s definition of smoking.
- **July 29, 2020:** Governor Sununu signed *House Bill 1245* which **increased the age from 19 to 21 to purchase, sell or possess tobacco products.** This includes vaping products. More than 95% of all smokers started before age 21. Unfortunately, the rate of electronic vapor use among youth in New Hampshire remains one of the highest in the U.S.

Breathe New Hampshire monitors a variety of bills that reflect our mission. Here are some topics for bills that we are tracking in the 2021 Legislative Session:

- Adequate resources from the tobacco fund for youth and young adult prevention to preserve long-term health.
- Flavored electronic cigarettes and disposal of those devices.
- Food in cigar shops.
- Pharmacist provider status and nicotine cessation therapy.



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COPD CONNECT - FREE TELEPHONE SERIES

Thursday, February 25 at 2:00 PM

Join Breathe NH for a new series on connecting with each other and information. Learn tips and resources to staying healthy, active and connected. This program will consist of 30-minute sessions with guest speakers and various topics.

This free program is open to individuals living with COPD and their caregivers.

For more information or to register: Contact Breathe NH at 603-669-2411 or info@BreatheNH.org.

2021 FUN PASS COUPON BOOK

Buy a Fun Pass and enjoy big savings at over 75 favorite New England family attractions all year long! Plan a visit to **Story Land, LEGOLAND Discovery Center Boston, Davis Farmland, Mount Washington Cog Railway, Whale's Tale Water Park**, zip lines, trampoline and amusement parks, whale watches, museums, and many more!

Many coupons admit a child 12 and under free or at a discounted rate with a paying adult, or they are BOGO (Buy One, Get One Free) so with one visit to some attractions, you cover the cost of the Fun Pass. Offers and deals vary by attraction. How much can you save?

Go to www.breathenh.org/fun-pass. The Fun Pass makes a great gift too!



PREPARING FOR YOUR FUTURE

January is that time of the year when we make resolutions and vow to get better organized as a new year begins. Making a will allows you to think about the future as you plan for what happens to your assets. Including Breathe New Hampshire in your estate plans, while still making sure you are providing for your loved ones is something important to consider. A gift of any size to the organization, either a specific amount or a residual amount of your estate, is a meaningful way to help ensure the organization will continue to advance its mission for many years to come. Your charitable donation supports programs related to COPD, youth nicotine addiction, and asthma. We offer educational programs and advocate for public policy to ensure lung health is a priority for all future generations.

Please Visit BreatheNH.org/support-us

