October is Healthy Lung Month and it is important, now more than ever, to take proactive measures to protect your lung health. To encourage healthy practices on campus, here are a few tips to stay safe this fall:

**Protect your Health**

The most effective way to not get sick this fall and winter is to maintain the health of your lungs. You can do this by maintaining good oral hygiene and brushing your teeth twice a day, getting the flu shot to protect yourself and others, and washing your hands with soap and water.

**Exercise Regularly**

With the cold weather creeping in, it is important to maintain a healthy level of physical activity whether it be going to the gym or walking around the house. Regular exercise promotes improved balance, reduced fatigue, and lowered risks of blood clots. Your lungs’ ability to obtain oxygen increases when you exercise, which can improve your quality of life.
Don’t Start Smoking or Vaping
Millions of people, including high school and college students, are indulging in nicotine use every day. Tobacco products contain carcinogenic material that can adversely affect the lungs and agitate your cells. There is a strong correlation between smoking and detrimental long-term complications, as this activity decreases your immune system’s effectiveness to fight off disease.

Our Health Today
In today’s world, it may be difficult to avoid external stressors to our lungs, such as pollution, sedentary lifestyles, and Covid-19. Therefore, we should take whatever steps we can to protect our lung health. Complications from various lung diseases affect more than 35 million Americans. Skyrocketing cases of chronic lung disease like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, are becoming more worrisome in our modern age. Although, by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, wearing masks, and getting our flu shots we will have a safer future.

To learn more, check out:
HEALTHY LITERACY MONTH

Health literacy is an absolutely important topic for everyone because, eventually, we each will need to gather and fully understand health information. Most importantly, **having good health literacy skills allows one to take control of their own well-being and make smart healthcare decisions**. UnitedHealth Group notes that “Improving Health Literacy Could Prevent Nearly 1 Million Hospital Visits and Save Over $25 Billion a Year.”

**Personal health literacy:**
The degree to which individuals can find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

**Organizational health literacy:**
The degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.
THE HISTORY

Helen Osborne founded Health Literacy Month in 1999, and said that the theme for Health Literacy Month is “Be a Health Literacy Hero.” The good news is that there are ways to raise awareness of health literacy and improve your own! Typically, the month is observed by using #HealthLiteracyMonth to post on social media, although understanding what this complex issue is also a great stepping stone in spreading the word.

• Improve your communication with health professionals. Make a list of your symptoms before you go in, have questions written down, and take a few notes when your doctor is explaining things to you.

• Make sure you know who to call with any questions when you leave.

• Attend health education programs at a library, community center, or anywhere you can find them in your community. Nowadays, it may be easier to find these online but ensure these are reputable sources (look for .edu, .gov, .org websites) or reputable individuals.

• Talk to local schools and request that kids are taught about health literacy and education so they are prepared as they get older.
While commonly overlooked and forgotten, the health of our eyes and overall visual system is vital for our everyday lives and activities. When most people think about eye injuries, they likely think about the risks of sun damage, sports accidents, household chemicals, and outdoor debris. However, when we reflect on our increased screen time from the COVID-19 pandemic and frequent technology use as students, we should recognize the importance of prevention in regard to eye health.

For computer and phone screens, eye injury can occur without our realization, especially after spending hours on Zoom for over a year and doing countless hours of homework in front of our screens. According to UPMC, computer vision syndrome (CVS) is a condition that can develop from spending too much time looking at screens. This syndrome can lead to blurry vision, headaches, dry eyes, alongside other struggles. Fortunately, there are several ways to combat CVS and avoid it altogether:
TIPS: EYE INJURY PREVENTION

Take Breaks
Make sure to give your eyes a rest from those screens! Take a few minutes to stretch the rest of your body and relax from the stress of blue light. Many professionals recommend the 20-20-20 rule: look away from the screen every 20 minutes at something 20 feet away, and continue this for about 20 seconds. By giving your eyes a break, you can avoid developing CVS and decrease eye damage.

Remember to Blink
Many people struggle to blink often when staring at a computer or phone screen for an extended period of time. One negative effect of this is that our eyes will dry out much faster than usual, By closing your eyes for several seconds at a time (while at an electronic device), and using eye drops once in a while if possible, your eyes will remain hydrated which promotes better health and function.

Watch the Brightness!
Blue light is no friend to eye health, especially when turned up to an overly high setting. Try to make sure that your screen is no brighter than the room you’re in. Further, using blue-light glasses will decrease the amount of light that enters your eyes from the screens. These tips allow for less strain for the eyes, as well as a softer glare overall.

Get a Regular Eye Exam
While CVS is not permanent, the symptoms of this condition can persist and even worsen as a result of lack of protection for the eyes and visual system. Due to this possibility, it can be beneficial to make an appointment for an eye exam with your doctor or an optometrist. Your provider will be able to tell you whether you’re experiencing CVS or a condition that may require a different type of treatment.
GLOBAL HAND WASHING DAY

During this time, when we are all obsessed with staying well and avoiding sickness, the best tool in our arsenal also happens to be the oldest: **washing our hands**. One study found that regular handwashing with soap can reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 infection by 36%, and another found that handwashing before returning from outdoors and touching your face may reduce the chance of infection by 2-30%. These are huge numbers! By increasing our hand hygiene, we can all do our part to fight the Covid variants and prevent further variants from arising. Besides wearing a mask, **washing your hands is the next best thing you can do to prevent yourself from getting Covid-19**!

While we take running water and available soap for granted, not everyone in the world can be so lucky. In 2020, **only 71% of people** had access to basic hand washing facilities. Across the globe, 2.3 billion people lack basic services, including 670 million people who have no hand washing facilities at all. Most of those without access to handwashing facilities live in countries with poor healthcare facilities as well, so not only is their risk of getting sick higher, their chance of improving their health is diminishing. Investment and donations into improving our access to handwashing across the globe is both impactful from a humanitarian perspective, but also from a financial one. Hygiene promotion can bring a return of $2 - $6 for every $1 invested. By increasing the number of people handwashing globally, we can **live happier and healthier lives!**
According to the American Psychological Association, APA, college students’ mental health is a growing national concern, especially with the rise in anxiety, depression, and relationship problems. Screening provides an effective firsthand mechanism to determine whether someone might suffer from depression. A link is attached below to a set of questionnaires that can be utilized to screen for depression and anxiety. [https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/depression/]

CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH? THINK ABOUT TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING

College can be stressful with deadlines, exams, work, and other obligations often taking over students' lives. As such, maintaining your mental health is important with stressors all around. We want to highlight that, while October is known as Mental Health Awareness Month, it is also regarded as National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month.
While over the past few years, mental health diseases such as depression have been undergoing de-stigmatization, enough still lingers, leaving two-thirds of all cases of depression undiagnosed. Raising awareness of screening is paramount to combat untreated depression and mental health conditions.

While there are numerous online screening tests available, Pitt students can employ a tool called Therapy Assistant Online (TAO) present on the Counseling Center’s Website. After screening, students can subsequently get in touch with a Pitt counselor. Moreover, students can discuss a screening with a counselor directly along with their healthcare provider if they feel that they're being negatively impacted by a mental health condition. TAO is among numerous online depression screening tests, including the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), and the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HAM-D).

Screening is vital to reduce untreated depression and other mental health disorders and as such, raising awareness about screening is necessary to help bridge the current gap present.