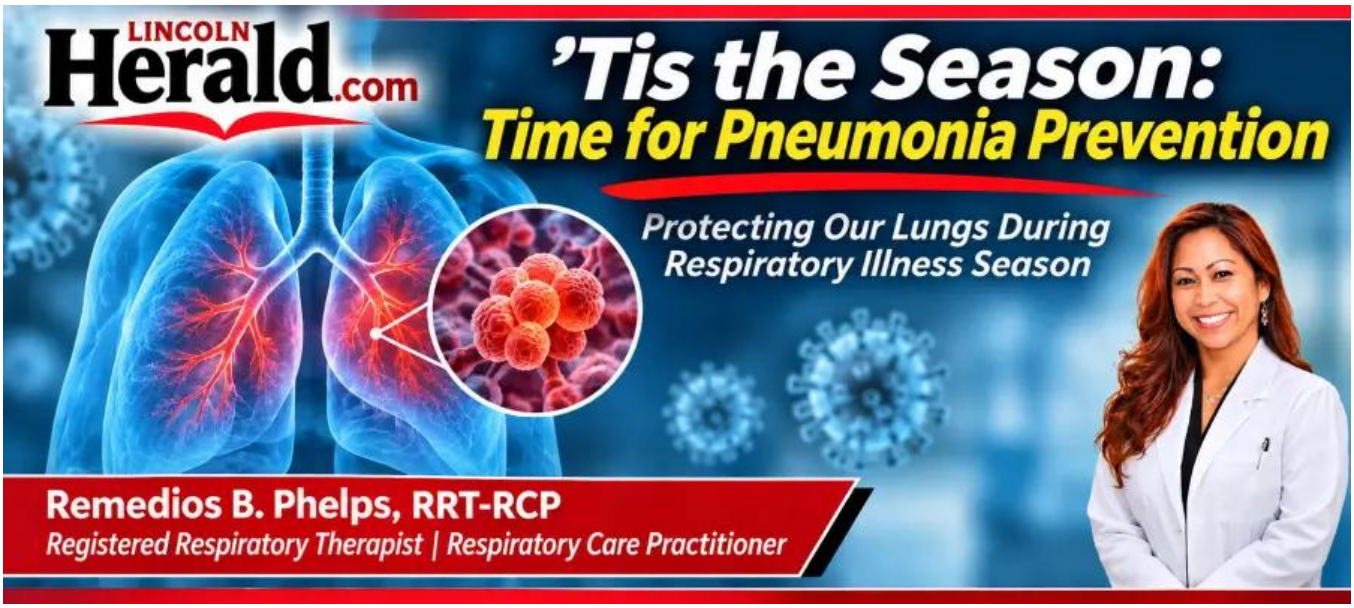

'Tis the Season: Time for Pneumonia Prevention

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LINCOLNTON, N.C. — As colder weather arrives and families across Lincoln County spend more time indoors, protecting our respiratory health becomes increasingly important. While pneumonia can occur at any time of the year, respiratory illness season brings additional concerns, particularly for those with underlying health conditions.

Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs that causes inflammation of the tiny air sacs. These air sacs may fill with fluid, making breathing difficult. The illness can develop following influenza, COVID-19 or other respiratory infections.

Although anyone can develop pneumonia, infants, young children, older adults and individuals who smoke are particularly vulnerable. Those living with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, heart disease or

weakened immune systems may also face a greater risk of serious illness.

Vaccination remains an important part of pneumonia prevention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends pneumococcal vaccination for children younger than 5, adults age 50 and older and certain younger individuals with underlying medical conditions.

Vaccinations against influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can also help protect eligible individuals from infections that may lead to pneumonia. Residents are encouraged to speak with their healthcare providers about which vaccinations are appropriate for their age and medical history.

Simple everyday habits can also help reduce the risk of respiratory infections. Regular handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces and improving indoor ventilation can help limit the spread of illness.

Avoiding tobacco smoke and properly managing chronic health conditions are equally important in maintaining healthy lungs.

Individuals experiencing respiratory illness should remain home until their symptoms are improving overall and they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. Additional precautions should be taken for the following five days to help protect others.

Common symptoms of pneumonia include coughing, fever, chills, fatigue, chest pain and rapid or difficult breathing. Older adults may also experience unusual or sudden confusion.

Individuals experiencing worsening or persistent symptoms should contact a healthcare professional. Severe breathing difficulties, blue or gray lips or sudden confusion require immediate emergency medical attention.

Early medical evaluation can help determine the appropriate course of treatment and reduce the risk of serious complications.

As a respiratory care practitioner, I encourage Lincoln County residents to make lung health a priority throughout the year. Taking preventive measures, reviewing recommended vaccinations and protecting vulnerable family members can make a meaningful difference.

Never ignore worsening respiratory symptoms or delay seeking medical attention when needed.

By practicing healthy habits and taking responsibility for our respiratory health, we can help protect ourselves, our loved ones and our community.

Prevention starts at home and together we can help build a healthier Lincoln County.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Lung Association.