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LATIN AMERICA HAS HIGH PREVALENCE OF LUNG DISEASES

The lung diseases, emphysema and bronchitis, are a greater health problem in Latin America than previously thought, concludes a study published online today (Friday November 4, 2005) by *The Lancet*. High rates of tobacco smoking, the main risk factor for COPD, could explain the prevalence but altitude may also play a part, state the authors.

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The investigators looked at the prevalence of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and bronchitis, in around a 1,000 people over 40 years of age in each of the following cities: Sao Paulo, Santiago, Mexico City, Montevideo, and Caracas. The researchers found that COPD prevalence ranged from 7.8% in Mexico City to almost 20% in Montevideo, higher than the expected 4–10% range found by an international review of COPD prevalence. The team also found a perfect correlation between the ranks of altitude in the five cities and the COPD rates.

Study author Professor Ana Maria Menezes (Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil, South America) states: "These results suggest that COPD is a greater health problem in Latin America than previously realised. Altitude may explain part of the difference in prevalence. Given the high rates of tobacco use in the region, increasing public awareness of burden of COPD is important."

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