



UK Health
Security
Agency

NHS

Your guide to the **RSV** vaccine for older adults

How to protect
yourself by having the
Respiratory Syncytial
Virus (RSV) vaccine



Information on the free RSV vaccine for people who:

- turned 75 years of age on or after 1 September 2024
- were already aged 75 to 79 years old on 1 September 2024

What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is an infectious disease of the airways and lungs. RSV infection often causes symptoms similar to a cold, including cough, sore throat, sneezing and runny or blocked nose. It can also make you become wheezy or short of breath and lead to pneumonia and other life-threatening conditions. There is no specific treatment, and most infections will get better by themselves. Every year thousands of older adults need hospital care for RSV, and some of them will die. RSV can be more severe in people with medical conditions such as heart or lung disease or a weakened immune system.

RSV infection is common in young children but is most serious for small babies and for older people.



How do you catch RSV?

RSV infections can occur all year round but cases peak every winter.

RSV can spread through coughs and sneezes. You can help to prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze (ideally with a tissue, or else into the bend of your elbow), and you can wash your hands frequently to reduce the risk of picking up the virus. Even with these measures it can be difficult to avoid RSV infection.

The best way to protect yourself is to have the vaccine.

How does the vaccine work?

Almost all older adults will have had several RSV infections during their life. A single dose of vaccine will help to boost protection as you reach an age group at highest risk of serious RSV infection.

Are there any other people eligible for the RSV vaccine?

Pregnant women are also being offered the vaccine to protect their babies from RSV. You can read the guide to the RSV vaccine for pregnant women here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-maternal-vaccination

Do I need to have the vaccine every year?

No, a single dose is expected to give you good protection for a few years.



Who should have the RSV vaccination?

Everyone turning 75 years old on or after the 1 September 2024 will be offered a single dose of RSV vaccine. This is because older adults are more at risk of serious complications from RSV. You can still get the vaccine up to the day before you turn 80.

For the first year of the programme, the vaccine will also be offered to those who are already aged 75 to 79 years on 1 September 2024 as part of a catch up programme.

What about people who are under 75 years?

Younger people will be offered the vaccine when they reach 75 years of age.

Can I have the RSV vaccine at the same time as my COVID-19 or flu vaccine?

RSV isn't normally arranged to be given at the same appointment as your COVID-19 or flu vaccines.

In certain clinical circumstances, your doctor or nurse can safely offer them at the same time.

Can I have the RSV vaccine at the same time as the shingles or pneumococcal vaccine?

Yes, you can have these vaccines at the same time.

Is there anybody who shouldn't have the vaccination?

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but tell the doctor or nurse if you have ever had a serious allergy to a vaccine, or any of the ingredients.

If you have a minor illness such as a cold you can receive the vaccine, but if you are very unwell or have a fever, the doctor or nurse may advise you to wait until you are better.

Will the vaccine protect me completely?

The vaccine has been shown to reduce the chance of you suffering from RSV disease. As with all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective and some people may still get RSV despite having a vaccination. If you do get RSV, it should be less severe.

How long will I be protected for?

In the clinical studies, RSV vaccine provided good protection for at least 2 years, and is expected to last longer.

Will I get any side effects?

You may get some soreness, redness or swelling at the site of the injection for a day or two after the vaccination.

In the first season of use in the US, over 12 million doses were given. A rare nervous system condition known as Guillain-Barré syndrome that leads to weakness was reported, around 10 cases for every million doses given. The same condition also occurs after a number of common infections and some vaccines but overall it is safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk having a potentially serious RSV infection.

What should I do now?

Your GP practice will contact you to make an appointment for your RSV vaccine when you turn 75.

If you are aged 75 to 79 and have not received an invite, contact your GP practice to make an appointment to have your RSV vaccine.

Where can I get more information?

You can read the patient information leaflet for the RSV vaccine called Abrysvo here:

www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/15309/pil

If you have further questions, speak to your practice nurse, GP or health team.



You can report suspected side effects on the Yellow Card website

or by calling the free phone line 0800 731 6789 (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) or by downloading the Yellow Card app.

www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard