

Factsheet for healthcare practitioners

Background

There is a significant burden of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) illness in the population of the United Kingdom (UK), which leads to a substantial impact on NHS/HSC services, especially during the winter months. RSV infection can occur throughout the year, but the typical RSV season in the UK starts in October, peaks in December and declines by March.

Since 2023, the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have been reviewing the latest evidence on immunisation products which can protect both infants and older adults against RSV infection and disease. RSV infection can occur at any age, however the risks of severe illness and complications from RSV are increased in older adults and in neonates and young infants.

The JCVI have considered a range of factors, including disease epidemiology, vaccine efficacy (effectiveness), vaccine safety and the cost effectiveness of introducing a routine RSV vaccination programme in the UK. On [7 June 2023](#), JCVI recommended that a universal immunisation programme should be developed to protect both infants and older adults.

In Northern Ireland from [1 September 2024](#), the RSV vaccine should be offered to:

- all pregnant women from 28 weeks' gestation
- adults turning 75 years old
- adults aged 75 years up until their 80th birthday as a one-off catch-up cohort throughout the first year of the programme.

The RSV vaccine should be offered throughout the year as this is a year-round programme.

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is an RNA virus that is a common cause of acute respiratory tract infections. Infection is usually mild and self-limiting, however for infants and older adults, the virus can lead to more severe illness and can result in hospitalisation. RSV is highly infectious and is transmitted via respiratory droplets (coughing and sneezing) or through close contact with an infected person or with contaminated surfaces.

At least half of children in the UK experience an RSV infection in the first year of life, and almost all will have experienced infection with RSV by the age of two. Previous infection with RSV results in only partial immunity to the virus, therefore individuals can be infected repeatedly throughout their life course.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Infection with RSV results in a range of acute respiratory symptoms, including: rhinitis (runny nose), cough, shortness of breath, wheeze, lethargy and occasionally fever.

Complications of RSV in infants and children

In infants, RSV can cause bronchiolitis (inflammation and narrowing of the small airways in the lungs), which can lead to significant breathing and feeding difficulties. Other paediatric complications of RSV infection include apnoea (temporary pauses in breathing) and hypoxaemia (low oxygen levels within the

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) maternal immunisation programme for infant protection: factsheet for healthcare practitioners

This factsheet for health professionals provides details of the immunisation programme for pregnant women which aims to protect their newborn babies against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

It covers topics including the symptoms and complications of RSV; eligibility; timing of vaccine administration; choice of vaccine; safety and effectiveness; storage and administration; precautions, side effects and contraindications; potential errors; and

FAQs.

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Details

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Health professionals

Downloads

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