

# 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:**

- are aged 75 years or older
- are an adult of any age living in a care home for older adults

## 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.publichealth.hscni.net/RSV-pregnancy](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/RSV-pregnancy)



### **Who should have the RSV vaccination?**

Everyone aged 75 years and older. This is because older adults are more at risk of serious complications from RSV. There is no upper age limit.

People living in care homes for older adults. This is because of the risk of serious RSV outbreaks. Most residents will already be eligible because of their age, but adults younger than 75 but living in a care home for older adults are also eligible.

### **Do I need to have the vaccine every year?**

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

### **What about people who are under 75 years?**

People will be offered the vaccine when they reach 75 years of age, or if they move into a care home for older adults.

### **Can I have the RSV vaccine at the same time as my flu vaccine?**

RSV isn't normally arranged to be given at the same appointment as your flu vaccine.

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 COVID-19, 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.

Over 12 million doses have been given to older adults in the USA and UK. A rare but serious nervous system condition known as Guillain-Barré syndrome that leads to weakness was reported, around 1 case for every 40,000 to 100,000 doses given, in the six weeks after vaccination. The same condition also occurs after a number of common infections and some vaccines. If you have symptoms such as tingling, numbness, weakness, sharp pain or pins and needles in your hands, feet, arms or legs, you should seek immediate medical attention. Overall, it is safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk having a potentially serious RSV infection.

## What should I do now?

If you are aged 75 years and over, your GP will invite you for your RSV vaccination if you have not already had it. This may be by letter, text message, phone call or email.

If you live in a care home for older adults, speak to a member of staff at your care home or your local Trust vaccination team about how to get the 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](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/15309/pil)**

If you have further questions, speak to your practice nurse, GP or vaccination team or visit **[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-vaccine-older-adults](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-vaccine-older-adults)**



### Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.  
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

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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](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard)**