**Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine**

Public FAQs

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**What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?**

[Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv/) is a common respiratory virus that affects the airways and lungs. RSV usually gets better by itself, but it can be serious for babies and older adults.

Symptoms of RSV include cough, sore throat, sneezing and a runny or blocked nose. RSV can also cause pneumonia and other life-threatening conditions. The virus is spread through coughs and sneezes.

**Who can get a vaccine for RSV?**

From 1 September 2024, an RSV vaccine will be offered to older adults, and to pregnant women, to give protection to their baby.

The vaccine will be available to:

* All adults turning 75 years old on or after 1 September 2024
* In the first year of the programme, there will be a one-off catch-up campaign for adults already aged 75-79 years old on 31 August 2024. This should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, with the aim to complete the majority of this by 31 August 2025. Adults will remain eligible for the vaccine until the day before their 80th birthday (those turning 80 in this first year will remain eligible until 31 August 2025).
* All women who are at least 28 weeks pregnant on or after 1 September 2024
* It is best for pregnant women to get the vaccine as close to 28 weeks pregnant as possible to maximise protection for their baby, although they can get the vaccine up until they give birth

Infants at high risk of RSV should also receive immunisation in accordance with the [Green Book (chapter 27a),](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/respiratory-syncytial-virus-the-green-book-chapter-27a) regardless of whether the mother was vaccinated during pregnancy.

**Why should I get the RSV vaccine?**

***For older people***

RSV is very common - almost all older adults will have had several RSV infections during their life. It usually gets better by itself, but it can be serious for older people, particularly those with medical conditions such as heart or lung disease, or a weakened immune system.

Each year thousands of older people need hospital care for RSV. Getting the RSV vaccine is the best way to protect yourself as you reach an age group at highest risk of RSV. The vaccine will reduce your chance of getting seriously ill if you do catch the virus. The vaccine is much safer than the risk of getting a potentially serious RSV infection.

***For pregnant women***

RSV is very common – 9 in 10 children catch RSV before the age of two. RSV usually gets better by itself, but it can be serious for babies, particularly babies under six months old, babies born prematurely, and babies with a weakened immune system or long-term lung or heart condition. RSV can cause bronchiolitis, a lung infection which can make it difficult for small babies to breathe..

Every year in England and Wales around 20,000 babies need hospital care for RSV and around 20 to 30 die from the virus.

Getting the vaccine during pregnancy is the best way to protect your baby from severe RSV. It reduces the risk of severe bronchiolitis by 70% in the first six months of life, when your baby is most at risk. Having the vaccine is much safer than the risk of your baby getting RSV.

**Why is this being introduced now?**

An independent group of clinical experts called the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation reviews the latest clinical evidence and data to advise the government on which vaccines the NHS should offer. In June 2023, the [JCVI advised](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rsv-immunisation-programme-jcvi-advice-7-june-2023/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-immunisation-programme-jcvi-advice-7-june-2023#programme-to-protect-neonates-and-infants) that a RSV immunisation programme should be developed for older adults and infants.

**How effective is the RSV vaccine?**

Getting the RSV vaccine during pregnancy reduces the risk of your baby developing severe bronchiolitis by 70% in the first 6 months of life.

A [recent detailed analysis](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10928299/)estimates that the RSV programme launching in England this autumn could typically prevent 5,000 hospitalisations and 15,000 emergency department attendances for babies.

The same modelling also suggests that the first season of the older adult’s catch-up programme could prevent around 2,500 hospital admissions, 15,000 GP visits and 60,000 RSV illnesses in older adults.

**Can you still catch RSV after having the vaccine****?**

***For older people***

Having the RSV vaccine doesn’t prevent you from catching RSV, but it does reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. Almost all older adults will have had several RSV infections in their life. A single dose of the vaccine will help to boost your protection as you reach an age group at the highest risk of serious RSV infection.

***For pregnant women***

Having the RSV vaccine doesn’t prevent you or your baby from catching RSV, but it does reduce your baby’s chance of becoming seriously ill.

**Is the vaccine safe? Are there any side effects?**

All vaccines offered in England have been approved for use by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The vaccine has met the MHRA’s strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

Like any other vaccine or medicine, the RSV vaccine is continuously being monitored for safety. The benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risk of side effects in the majority of patients.

You should talk to your medical professional if you experience any side effects after getting the vaccine. You and your healthcare professional can report any suspected side effects through the tried and trusted Yellow Card Scheme.

A rare side effect (may affect up to 1 in 1000 people) is [Guillain-Barré syndrome](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/guillain-barre-syndrome/) (a neurological disorder that usually starts with pins and needles and weakness of the limbs and may progress to paralysis of part or all of the body).

An incredibly rare side effect (may affect up to 1 in 10,000 people) are allergic reactions – signs of an allergic reaction include swelling of the face, lips, tongue or throat, hives, difficulty breathing or swallowing and dizziness.

**Is the vaccine safe for my baby?**

Studies have shown that the RSV vaccine is very safe for you and your baby. Having the vaccine during pregnancy is much safer than the risk of your baby getting RSV.

Many thousands of women have had the RSV vaccine around the world, including over 100,000 women in the USA.

**Why aren’t people over 79 years old eligible?**

The government decide which groups will be eligible for free vaccines on the NHS. Their decision is based on the independent advice of clinical experts in the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), who review the latest clinical evidence and data, including how long protection lasts and how common RSV infection is within different age groups. The JCVI considered all available information when advising on which age groups would benefit most from having the RSV vaccine and concluded there is limited evidence of efficacy in those aged over 80. The effectiveness of this vaccination programme will be monitored by JCVI and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). If you have any further questions, please email [enquiries@ukhsa.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ukhsa.gov.uk)

**How do I get my RSV vaccine?**

If you’re 75-79 years old, your GP practice will contact you to offer you a vaccination appointment.

Pregnant women can get the vaccine from 28 weeks of pregnancy. If you’re pregnant, speak to your maternity service or GP surgery to get your free RSV vaccine.

**Do I have to pay for the vaccine?**

No, the RSV vaccine is free for people who are eligible (people aged 75-79 and pregnant women).

**Can I get vaccinated privately?**

GPs are not permitted to offer RSV vaccination privately to individuals registered at their practice. GPs, community pharmacists and all other providers of a private vaccination service must order RSV vaccine directly from the manufacturer. They cannot use stock centrally procured for the national programme. Individuals who are not eligible to receive RSV vaccine as part of the national programme, but who wish to pay for the vaccine privately, should be advised to discuss their request with a private provider and be made aware that they will be liable for the full cost of the vaccine and any additional administration charges that the private provider may apply.

**Can I get RSV from the vaccine?**

No, the RSV vaccine is not a live vaccine. You cannot develop RSV infection from the vaccine.

**Can I have the RSV vaccine if I feel unwell?**

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 giving your vaccine may advise you to wait until you feel better.

**Which vaccines are available and who manufactures them?**

Following the outcome of a competitive tender process, Pfizer’s Abrysvo™ vaccine will be used in both the older adult and pregnancy vaccination programmes.

**Can I get the RSV vaccine at the same time as my other vaccinations?**

***For older people***

The RSV vaccine isn’t normally arranged to be given at the same time as other vaccines, but in certain clinical circumstances, your doctor or nurse can give the RSV vaccine safely together with other vaccines.

***For pregnant women***

The RSV vaccine isn’t normally arranged to be given at the same time as your other pregnancy vaccinations. Ideally you should get your whooping cough vaccine at 20 weeks pregnant, your RSV vaccine at 28 weeks pregnant, and the flu vaccine as soon as it is available to you so that you’re protected through the colder months when flu circulates most.

If you’ve missed out on getting your vaccines, you can safely have them together later in your pregnancy.

[Providers should check the RSV: the green book, chapter 27a for the latest advice on vaccine co-administration which can be accessed [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/respiratory-syncytial-virus-the-green-book-chapter-27a).]

**Do I need to get the vaccine during every pregnancy?**

Yes, you should get the RSV vaccine during each of your pregnancies to give the best protection to your baby.

**Does the RSV vaccine contain animal products?**

No, the RSV vaccine available through the NHS does not contain animal products.

**What should I do if I have allergies /** **I’ve had an allergic reaction to other vaccines before?**

Almost everyone who is eligible can have the RSV vaccine, but you should tell the person giving you the vaccine if you have ever had a serious allergy to a vaccine or to any of the ingredients.

**How do I prevent myself from getting RSV?**

RSV is spread when infected people cough or sneeze. Washing your hands regularly and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze can help, but it is difficult to prevent RSV from spreading. The best way to protect yourself from getting seriously ill with RSV is to get the vaccine.

**How do vaccines work?**

Vaccines teach your immune system how to create antibodies that protect you from diseases. It's usually much safer for your immune system to learn this through vaccination than by catching the diseases and treating them. Once your immune system knows how to fight a disease, it can often protect you. If you get vaccinated during pregnancy, some of these antibodies are passed on to your unborn baby, protecting them in their first few months of life.