

RAISING AWARENESS OF RSV AS PART OF YOUR VACCINE PREVENTABLE RESPIRATORY DISEASES

WHAT IS RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a contagious virus that mainly affects the respiratory tract system, causing infections in the lungs. In Canada, we typically see an increase in RSV infections from the fall to the early spring season.

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT RSV?

For older adults, RSV can pose serious health problems that impact their overall health and quality of life. It's essential to protect both young children and older adults through vaccination measures. The intergenerational prevalence of RSV calls for widespread prevention efforts to protect families, communities and reduce the overall burden of RSV across different age groups.

In Canada, health experts are bracing for a potential "triple-demic" season of surging RSV, COVID-19, and influenza cases this fall and winter season. RSV poses a significant burden in healthcare systems, leading to high hospitalization rates, long-term morbidity, and increased frailty.

By prioritizing RSV prevention, we can safeguard the health of communities and ensure healthcare systems run smoothly.

WHO IS AT RISK OF RSV?

- Older Adults (65+)
- Infants
- Adults with heart or lung disease
- Adults or children with weakened immune systems

HOW DOES RSV SPREAD?

RSV can spread through the air in infected droplets through the eyes, nose and mouth by:

- Touching contaminated surfaces (e.g. countertop, desk, etc.)
- Through close contact with infected individuals (e.g. sharing drinks or having an infected person sit next to you)

Reinfections of RSV can occur, and individuals of any age can be impacted, however reinfections pose greater and more serious health consequences in older adults

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RSV?

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Congestion
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Mild headache
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Decreases appetite

SEVERE SYMPTOMS

- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Blue or gray skin color

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS FROM RSV INFECTIONS?

In severe cases, RSV can lead to pneumonia (an infection of the lungs) and bronchitis (inflammation of the small airways), particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as infants, older people, and individuals with underlying health conditions.

RSV may also lead to hospitalization, admission to the intensive care unit (ICU), and, in extreme instances, even death. RSV has been shown to exacerbate chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, or heart failure and may result in prolonged recovery times, reducing independence and making people vulnerable to other adverse health consequences.

If you are experiencing any severe symptoms, seek immediate medical help or call **911**.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MYSELF FROM CONTRACTING RSV?

Some measures that can be taken to reduce your risk of contracting and spreading RSV include:

- Hand hygiene (wash your hands after coming from outdoors, touching hard surfaces and etc.)
- Wearing a mask in crowded areas
- Coughing into your sleeve or elbow (avoid hands)
- Staying home if you are sick and avoid close contact with others

You may also ask your healthcare provider about vaccination to protect against RSV.

WHO SHOULD GET THE RSV VACCINE?

RSV poses a substantial health risk to **older adults**, those suffering from **chronic health conditions**, and children. A vaccine is currently approved in Canada for adults aged 60 and older, as well as pregnant individuals.

Recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI):

- Adults 75 years of age and older, particularly for those who are at increased risk of severe RSV disease.
- Adults 60 years of age and older who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.
- RSV vaccine should be considered as an individual decision by adults 60 to 74 years of age in consultation with their health care provider.

It is important to discuss the benefits and risks of an RSV vaccine with your primary health care provider.

HOW CAN WE ADVOCATE FOR WIDESPREAD RSV VACCINATION AMONG OLDER ADULTS AND THOSE AT RISK?

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and patient and professional groups are trusted sources of information on vaccination.

Here's how you can contribute:

- **Disseminate Evidence-Based Information:** Provide communities, collaborators, and older adults with accurate, evidence-informed details about RSV and the benefits of vaccination.
- **Stay Informed on Policies:** Keep up-to-date with governmental policies and guidelines regarding vaccine eligibility to ensure your information is current and relevant.
- **Participate in Awareness Campaigns:** NGOs, CSOs, patient and professional groups and other key stakeholders across Canada all need to work together to engage with communities on RSV vaccination awareness, especially among older adults and at-risk populations