

RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV) AND RSV VACCINE

Updated December 18, 2023

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a common and very contagious respiratory virus that typically causes cold-like symptoms. It is a major cause of lower respiratory infection (affecting the airways and lungs), particularly in infants, young children and older adults.

How does RSV spread?

- RSV is very contagious. It spreads from one person to another through respiratory droplets (e.g., through direct contact with someone who is infected, by being close to someone with the infection who is coughing or sneezing, or by touching something that has been touched by an infected person, such as door handles or countertops)
- individuals are most likely to catch RSV from late fall to early spring when the virus is most active

High-Risk Individuals

Groups that are more likely to have severe illness or complications that may require hospitalization:

- Children younger than two years of age
- Older adults
- Individuals with heart or respiratory conditions (e.g., asthma, lung disease)
- Immunocompromised individuals

What are RSV symptoms?

Common symptoms of RSV are similar to those of the cold, flu or COVID-19, including:

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Fever
- Wheezing
- Decreased appetite

Symptoms typically begin four to six days after exposure. While most RSV symptoms will go away within a week, individuals should seek medical attention if they are not drinking enough fluids or experiencing worsening symptoms.

Individuals who have trouble breathing should seek immediate medical attention.

RSV vaccine: Arexvy

The Arexvy vaccine reduces the risk of developing RSV-associated lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) for individuals 60 years of age and older. Studies have shown it to be over 82% effective in preventing LRTD.

- Arexvy is given as a single-dose RSV vaccine
- If feeling sick, speak to a health care provider before receiving the RSV vaccine
- It is recommended to **wait 14 days (two weeks) before or after getting an RSV vaccine** to receive another vaccine, such as COVID-19 and flu

What are the common side effects of RSV vaccination?

RSV vaccinations may cause some side effects and in most cases are mild and last only a few days, Common side effects of RSV vaccination include:

- Pain, redness, and swelling where the shot was given
- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle or joint pain

There were very rare reports of serious neurologic conditions, including Guillain-Barré syndrome. It is unclear whether the vaccine caused these events.

Free RSV Vaccine Program

The Ministry of Health covers the full cost of the vaccine for those aged 60 years and older living in long-term care homes, Elder Care Lodges and retirement homes licensed to provide dementia care services and recently expanded eligibility for people 60 and older who are:

- Hospital ALC patients
- Receiving dialysis
- Transplant recipients
- Experiencing homelessness
- Indigenous, including those in urban dwellings

Those aged 60 years and older who are not covered by the publicly funded RSV vaccine program can purchase the vaccine from a pharmacy with a prescription from their family doctor or a primary care provider.

Learn more at [Ontario.ca/RSV](https://ontario.ca/RSV)