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Vaccination saves lives



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Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination for adults at risk

You can get the RSV vaccine if you:

- **are aged 75 years or older**
- **live in a care home for older adults, or**
- **are aged 65 to 74 years and have a certain health condition.**



Scan me for more information on RSV

Key facts

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common cause of respiratory tract infections. For most adults and children, RSV causes a mild illness, such as a cough or cold, and usually gets better on its own.

In a small number of older adults, RSV can lead to serious health problems. People with lung disease or a weakened immune system are more at risk. It can cause pneumonia (infection of the lungs) and, in some cases, death. RSV may also make symptoms of existing heart and lung conditions worse.

Most RSV infections occur in autumn and winter, but you can have the RSV vaccine at any time of the year.

The RSV vaccine is safe. It meets all safety standards. Once a vaccine is in use, its safety continues to be monitored.

Act now to protect yourself from RSV

You can help protect yourself against serious illness from RSV by having the RSV vaccination when it is offered to you.

How is RSV spread?

RSV spreads when someone with the virus coughs or sneezes. You can also catch RSV by touching surfaces or objects that have the virus on them. Most people have had RSV as a child, but a past infection may not prevent you from getting RSV again.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

RSV infection causes symptoms similar to a cold. These include:

- a cough
- a runny or blocked nose
- sneezing, and
- tiredness.

In some cases, RSV can cause wheezing, shortness of breath or a fever, and may lead to pneumonia.

Why is the RSV vaccine part of the routine UK immunisation schedule?

Before the RSV vaccine programme started, RSV was thought to cause around 400 to 600 deaths each year in Wales in people aged 75 or over. In September 2023, vaccine experts gave their advice on RSV vaccination. They said there should be an RSV vaccination programme to help protect older adults.

Recent research shows that the RSV vaccine can lower the chance of being admitted to hospital. In people aged 75 to 79 years, it reduces this risk by around 75%.

There is also an RSV vaccination programme for pregnant women to help protect babies against serious illness from RSV.

Can I still get RSV even if I have had the vaccine?

Vaccination is one of the best ways to prevent severe illness from RSV. No vaccine is 100% effective, so it is still important to know the signs and symptoms of RSV, even if you are vaccinated.

How do I protect myself?

You can get the vaccine to help protect against RSV.

You can also protect yourself and others by:

- covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- throwing used tissues in the bin as soon as possible
- regularly washing your hands with soap and warm water, and
- keeping your environment (for example, hard surfaces) clean.

Who will be offered the RSV vaccine?

You will be offered the RSV vaccine if you:

- are aged 75 or over
- live in a care home for older adults (whatever your age), or

- are aged 65 to 74 years and have one of the health conditions listed below:
 - poorly controlled asthma – asthma that causes symptoms often
 - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) – a group of lung conditions that makes breathing hard
 - bronchiectasis – a lung condition where the airways are damaged and make a lot of mucus
 - cystic fibrosis – a genetic condition that causes thick mucus in the lungs
 - interstitial lung fibrosis – scarring of the lungs
 - pneumoconiosis – lung disease caused by breathing in certain types of dust
 - bronchopulmonary dysplasia – a long-term lung condition that begins in some babies
 - a weakened immune system because of illness or medical treatment

How will I get my vaccination?

The NHS will let you know when and where to get the vaccine. If you think you might have missed the invitation, speak to your GP surgery.

The RSV vaccine is an injection given in the upper arm.

Do I need to have the vaccine every year?

No. Vaccine trials show the vaccine gives good protection for at least two years and is likely to last longer.

Is there anyone who should not have the RSV vaccine?

Very few people cannot have the RSV vaccination. The vaccine should not be given to anyone who has had a serious (life-threatening) reaction to:

- a previous dose of the vaccine, or
- any ingredient in the vaccine.

Speak to the person giving you the vaccine if you have had a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine or its ingredients in the past.

Is the RSV vaccine safe?

Yes, the RSV vaccine is safe. It meets all safety standards. Once a vaccine is in use, its safety continues to be monitored.

What if I have a fear of needles?

If you have a fear of needles, let the person giving you the vaccine know. They will support you.

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects, but not everyone gets them. Most side effects are mild and may last a day or two.

The most common side effects include:

- pain, swelling and redness in the arm where the injection was given
- headache
- tiredness
- muscle or joint pain.

Rare or very rare side effects from the vaccine include:

- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a nerve condition that can cause muscle weakness, and
- allergic reactions, such as swelling of the face, lips, tongue or throat, hives (a raised, itchy rash). People may also have difficulty swallowing or feel dizzy.

GBS is a rare but serious condition. There are thought to be around 10 to 25 cases of GBS for every million doses of the vaccine given to older people. GBS can also happen after some common infections. This includes flu, tummy bugs, and in rare cases after other vaccines.

Get medical help straight away if you notice any of the following symptoms after your vaccine

- tingling
- numbness
- weakness
- sharp pain
- pins and needles

These symptoms may occur in your hands, feet, arms or legs. Ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111 Wales.

Rarely, people can have a severe reaction soon after the vaccination. This can cause breathing difficulties and they may collapse. This is called an anaphylactic reaction, and it can also happen with other medicines and food. These reactions are extremely rare, affecting less than one in a million people. Staff who give vaccinations are trained to manage these reactions.

People who have an anaphylactic reaction can be successfully treated. They usually recover within a few hours.

Serious side effects are rare. Overall, the vaccine is safer than the risk of serious illness from RSV infection.

See the back page of this leaflet for further details on:

- the vaccine, including all possible side effects, and
- reporting suspected side effects through the Yellow Card scheme.

If you have any questions about side effects, you can ask the person giving you the vaccine.

If the side effects last for more than a few days, you should talk to your healthcare professional. You can also contact NHS 111 Wales by calling **111**.

Can the RSV vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

The RSV vaccine can be given at the same time as most other vaccines. The person giving you your vaccine will let you know which vaccines can be given together.

If I am unwell, should I have the vaccine?

A cold or other minor illness is not a reason to delay your vaccine.

If you have a high temperature (fever) above 38.5C, wait until you are better to have the vaccine. However, you should try to have it as soon as possible. If you cannot attend your vaccination appointment, please cancel it and make a new one.

If in doubt, discuss this with the person giving you your vaccination.

Did you know?

These other routine vaccines are available for adults aged 65 and over.

- Influenza (flu)
- Pneumococcal
- Shingles

For more information, visit phw.nhs.wales/vaccines

To help stop viruses spreading, remember to:



Catch it

Use a tissue
when you sneeze
or cough.



Bin it

Put the tissue in
the bin as soon
as possible.



Kill it

Wash your
hands or use
hand sanitiser.

The information in this leaflet is correct at the time of publication. For the most up-to-date information, please visit phw.nhs.wales/vaccines

Further information

If you have any questions or want more information, you can go to **111.wales.nhs.uk** (external site). You can also talk to your doctor or nurse or contact NHS 111 Wales by calling **111**.

You can find out more information on vaccines offered in Wales at **phw.nhs.wales/vaccines**

To find out more about the vaccine, including its contents and possible side effects, go to **medicines.org.uk/emc** (external site). You will need to enter the name of the vaccine in the search box. You can also see the patient leaflet online.

You can find the name of the vaccine at **phw.nhs.wales/RSV-older-adults**

You should report suspected side effects online at **www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard** (external site). You can also download the Yellow Card app, or call **0800 731 6789** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

To find out how the NHS uses your information, go to **111.wales.nhs.uk/AboutUs/Yourinformation** (external site)



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Public Health Wales is the national public health agency in Wales.

We work to protect and improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities for the people of Wales.

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