

# RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV) AND RSV VACCINE FOR OLDER ADULTS

*Updated August 2024*

## 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 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 get infected with 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 vaccines: Arexvy and Abrysvo

RSV vaccines reduce the risk of developing RSV-associated lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) for individuals 60 years of age and older. Studies have shown they are very effective in preventing LRTD.

- Either Arexvy or Abrysvo RSV vaccine is given as a single-dose
- RSV vaccine provides multi-year protection (which means that individuals who already received the RSV vaccine do not need an additional dose)
- If feeling sick, speak to a health care provider before receiving the RSV vaccine
- RSV vaccine may be provided at the same time as other vaccines, 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 injection was given
- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle or joint pain

## Free RSV Vaccine Program

The Ministry of Health covers the full cost of the vaccine for individuals aged 60 years and older who are:

- Residents of long-term care homes, elder care lodges, or retirement homes
- Hospitalized receiving alternate level of care (ALC)
- Receiving dialysis
- Transplant recipients
- Experiencing homelessness
- Identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Metis

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)