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Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine & Older Adults: What You Need to Know

Why should older adults consider RSV vaccination?

RSV causes only mild upper respiratory infections for most people, but in young children and older adults it can lead to severe disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that, in the United States, RSV annually causes between 6,000 and 10,000 deaths in adults older than 65. According to the CDC, the average age of hospitalization due to RSV for American Indians and Alaskan Natives is 56, versus 73 for White individuals.

What are the vaccine recommendations?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and recommends adults 60 and older may receive a single dose of RSV vaccine based on discussions between the patient and health care provider. While everyone 60 and older is able to receive a dose of RSV vaccine, it is especially important for individuals who are at high risk to develop severe RSV disease to have a conversation with their trusted health care provider to see if RSV vaccine is right for them.

Adults at highest risk for severe RSV disease include:

- Older adults, especially those 65 and older
- Adults with chronic heart disease, such as congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease
- Adults with chronic lung diseases, such as COPD and asthma
- Adults who are immunocompromised
- Adults with hematologic disorders
- Adults with neurologic disorders
- Adults with endocrine disorders, such as diabetes
- Adults with kidney and liver disorders
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- American Indian or Alaskan Native individuals

How effective is the vaccine?

There are two vaccines (Arexvy and Abrysvo) available in the United States that protect against RSV. Both vaccines performed well in clinical trials at greater than 80% efficacy against lower respiratory tract illness through one RSV season. Real world effectiveness data may differ from the clinical trial data.

What are the side effects of RSV vaccine?

Side effects, such as pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site, fatigue, fever, headache, and joint or muscle pain can occur after RSV vaccination.

Three cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) were identified during the clinical trials of these vaccines. GBS is a rare neurologic disorder that causes muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. GBS is most often caused by infections but can also rarely occur after certain vaccines. Studies are still being conducted to determine if the RSV vaccine was the cause of these events. RSV vaccines will continue to be monitored for safety even after they are available widely on the commercial market. Patients should discuss the benefits and risks of vaccination against the risks of severe RSV illness with a trusted health care provider.

Can I get the RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?

RSV vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. Administering RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines may lead to increased side effects. Talk to your health care provider about what is best for your health care needs.

How expensive is the RSV vaccine?

RSV vaccine will be covered by private insurance companies and under Medicare Part D. Covered individuals should have no out-of-pocket costs for this vaccine. Uninsured individuals may qualify in the future for Patient Assistance Programs through the vaccine manufacturers.

Where can I get the RSV vaccine?

RSV vaccines will be offered in many pharmacies, clinics and local health departments. To avoid billing issues, it is usually best to make sure that your health care provider or pharmacy administering the vaccine is able to bill your Medicare Part D plan.

Will I need to get vaccinated again for RSV?

While data showed that one vaccination could provide some protection for at least two RSV seasons, no determination has been made to determine if additional vaccines may be needed in the future. Additional clinical trials are in process to determine if booster doses are necessary.