

PRINT-RSV vaccine offers protection for people at risk

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) often looks like a common cold, but it's a virus that can have much more serious consequences, especially for babies and older adults.

A vaccine offers protection for people at greatest risk. And for older people, it can be a one-time shot rather than an annual vaccination.

Talha Khan, MD, a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare, says RSV is a common respiratory virus that can affect people of all ages. Young infants and older adults are among those most likely to develop severe illness.

"It can cause pretty severe respiratory infection that can lead to hospitalization and even death, so it is something we don't take lightly. And we do have a vaccine for it now. So we do recommend getting that vaccine, if they're eligible, so they have that extra layer of protection."

For adults, the RSV vaccine is recommended for everyone age 75 and older.

"It can be given to individuals who are younger than that – age 50 to 74 – if they have some chronic conditions: respiratory disease, things like COPD, asthma, heart disease and if they're a current smoker. All those things put them at increased risk for a more severe infection."

For infants, RSV can be particularly dangerous during the virus's typical fall and winter season. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) points out it is the number one cause of hospitalization among infants in the U.S.

The RSV vaccine can offer preventive protection when given to the baby after birth.

"And then it's also recommended for pregnant women if they're pregnant during that respiratory virus season [September-January], as well. They recommend either pregnant women get it or the infant gets it once their born, typically not both."

During a particularly bad respiratory virus season in 2022, OSF OnCall launched [a free, at-home monitoring service](#) for babies and toddlers up to five years old. The digital service continues today and includes an at-home care kit and easy access to a real-time chat. If necessary, a video visit is an option for parents or guardians of an infant or young child with any respiratory illness, including RSV.

While RSV is common, many older adults may not be as familiar with the vaccine as they are with annual flu or COVID-19 shots.

"A few of my patients have kind of brought up that, 'Oh, that's one of the vaccines I've never heard of,'" says Dr. Khan. "But, again, it is important because it can cause those severe respiratory infections, [including] pneumonia, and potentially even lead to death. So, if we can stop that or stop you from getting a serious infection with a one-time vaccine, then why not just get that done."

For people who may qualify for the vaccine, health providers recommend talking with a health care professional about their individual risk factors and the best way to protect against severe RSV.

With a single dose offering long-term protection, the decision may be one that is easier to make than most people realize.

Dr. Talha Khan is a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare in Bloomington, Illinois.