

## **Script – Print – RSV's impact on your baby**

Last year, hospitals across the country were slammed with patients suffering from RSV – respiratory syncytial virus. While it's tough on adults, it can be especially difficult on babies.

RSV can be serious for infants because their airways are not as developed as adults. With small airways, babies have a difficult time getting the oxygen they need when they become really sick. The RSV virus directly attacks the lungs, causing breathing problems, hospitalization and even death.

"RSV is most seen in the fall and winter, and it can be quite dangerous for infants and children," says Casey Sager, MD, an OB/GYN with OSF HealthCare. "It is the number one cause of hospitalizations in infants."

In September, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended the first RSV vaccine for pregnant women to protect their newborn from serious RSV illness. The new vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of babies being hospitalized with RSV by 57% in the first six months after birth.

According to the CDC, when someone gets the RSV vaccine, their body responds by making a protein that protects against the virus that causes RSV. The process takes about two weeks.

When a pregnant woman gets the RSV vaccine, their antibodies pass on to their baby through the placenta and her breast milk. So, babies who are born at least two weeks after their mother gets vaccinated against RSV are protected from birth, when infants are at the highest risk of RSV.

"The RSV vaccine that was recently approved is targeted towards pregnant women between 32 weeks gestation and 36 weeks and six days gestation, and that's to optimize the effects of the vaccine before the baby's born," says Dr. Sager.

Mild symptoms of RSV in pregnant women are sneezing, runny nose and fever. But RSV-complications can include sepsis, pneumonia and respiratory failure. A woman may be at higher risk of severe RSV during pregnancy if she has a preexisting lung disease, such as asthma.

With cases of flu, COVID and RSV on the rise, Dr. Sager encourages women to be as informed as possible about ways to keep their baby healthy.

"It's absolutely important to have the vaccine conversation with your provider, with your spouse and with the people who are going to be around the baby a lot," says Dr. Sager. "So, make sure everyone's on the same page and can provide the most protection to the new infant."

In addition to keep up to date on vaccines, Dr. Sager encourages patients to practice healthy habits. "The take home message is the RSV vaccine is a great thing moms can do in pregnancy to help reduce the risk of a serious illness in their infants. This of course is in addition to the basic principles of good hand hygiene and not going out if you're sick."

[OSF OnCall offers a remote patient monitoring program for babies and young toddlers with respiratory illnesses.](#) The no-cost service connects those at home with medical specialists virtually, providing education and digital prompts to discuss signs/symptoms over a 10-day period.

The OSF OnCall RSV program is available to anyone in Illinois or Michigan. Patients must have a positive RSV test or diagnosis to qualify. To learn more about the program, [click here](#). If you are interested in finding a location where you can receive the RSV vaccine, visit the CDC [website](#).