

RSV vaccine finally available for some
OSF HealthCare Newsroom
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PRINT SCRIPT

After nearly six decades of research, experiments and testing, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has officially approved the first RSV vaccine.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory virus that causes mild, cold-like symptoms. While the virus is normally mild in most people, it can be extremely serious for infants and some higher-risk older adults.

Douglas Kasper, MD, section head of infectious disease at the University Of Illinois College Of Medicine Peoria and an infectious disease specialist for OSF HealthCare, says, currently, the Arexvy vaccine is only approved for individuals 60 and older but the hope is to expand who can receive the RSV vaccine by the end of summer.

“There are ongoing trials looking at vaccinating mothers who are pregnant,” Dr. Kasper says. “This would be for potential protection of unborn children, but that has not been approved yet. There’s expected re-evaluation of that data coming this summer. Hopefully by August we get some updated patient groups.”

Dr. Kasper says if the RSV vaccine is successful in pregnant women, it could provide life-saving antibodies for their babies.

“We’re trying to use the mother’s ability to create an immune response, because the baby cannot do that on their own. So if we can vaccinate during pregnancy, which is the study group we’re awaiting data for, there would be a huge benefit for young children that currently does not exist,” Dr. Kasper says.

Dr. Kasper says this vaccine is much different than the COVID-19 vaccine.

“This is not an mRNA vaccine which is something we talked very commonly with COVID-19,” Dr. Kasper says. “This is more of a traditional vaccine. The person is being exposed to a protein from the virus and then they make an immune response that protects them if they were ever exposed to the virus. It’s much more akin to the influenza vaccine that most people are comfortable with.”

Dr. Kasper says most older adults who get RSV experience mild symptoms. But he says doctors have seen a change in RSV symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Particularly those with chronic lung disease, RSV can almost mimic COVID-like illness that brought some people to the hospital,” Dr. Kasper says.

Dr. Kasper adds that the late summer timing would be good to expand the RSV vaccine for other high-risk groups, since most cases are normally seen in the fall through spring.