RSV Vaccines Explained:
Answers for Adults 50+

CVEEP
Fighting Infectious Respiratory Disease

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory virus. In many people, it causes cold-like symptoms, including cough, sore throat, fatigue, runny nose, and headache.[1] However, for adults ages 50 and older, RSV can be far more serious. It can cause more severe illnesses such as pneumonia, bronchiolitis (an infection of the lungs), congestive heart failure, or worsening of asthma or COPD symptoms. Adults who get very sick from RSV may need to be hospitalized — and severe RSV can be life threatening.[2]

Why should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination is the most simple, effective tool to protect yourself from severe RSV illness. RSV vaccines can help prevent the risk of complications if you do get sick and reduce your chance of needing to be hospitalized or have further health setbacks.

Who should get an RSV vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends **everyone ages 75 and older get an RSV vaccine**. Adults ages **50-74** who are at increased risk of severe RSV are also recommended to get an RSV vaccine.[3]

If I've already received the RSV vaccine, do I need to get another?

The RSV vaccine is not currently an annual vaccine. Protection from the RSV vaccine lasts for more than a year, meaning that if you received a dose (including last year), you do not need to get another RSV vaccine.

What conditions put someone at increased risk?

Certain health and environmental conditions can put you at greater risk for severe RSV disease. If you have an ongoing health condition like chronic heart or lung disease, a weakened immune system, live in a nursing home — or just aren't sure — ask your health care provider or pharmacist whether an RSV vaccine is right for you.

Why is there a different recommendation for people under the age of 75?

While the risk of severe RSV increases with age, RSV can also exacerbate existing medical conditions in adults ages 50-74. For instance, a case of RSV in someone with COPD can trigger serious complications. Vaccination offers an added layer of protection for adults with ongoing health conditions.

If I am at increased risk for RSV, are there different steps to get vaccinated?

No. You do not need to bring supporting medical records or proof of any condition that puts you at increased risk. According to the CDC, self-reporting a risk condition is sufficient evidence. Pharmacists and providers should not deny RSV vaccination for this reason.[4]

When is the best time to get the RSV vaccine?

You can get an RSV vaccine at any time of year, but August through October is ideal — just before RSV season starts circulating widely. If you have not received your vaccine yet, it's not too late. Vaccination at any time still offers strong protection, which lasts for more than one year. RSV vaccines are not an annual vaccine, meaning you're covered for multiple seasons once you've received it.[4]

Where can I get the vaccine? What if my doctor doesn't have any in stock?

RSV vaccines are available at pharmacies, doctor's offices, and public health or community health clinics. If your provider or pharmacy doesn't have the vaccine in stock, ask for a referral or contact your state health department. You can also use CVEEP's vaccine locator tool to find nearby locations.

CVEEP Vaccine Locator Tool

Will my insurance cover the RSV vaccine?

Yes. Nearly all private and public health insurance plans cover vaccines recommended by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) free of cost.[5] If you don't have health insurance, contact your local or state health department to find free or low-cost vaccine programs.

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

Like all vaccines, RSV vaccination can cause mild, temporary side effects. Common ones include pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site as well as fatigue, fever, headache, nausea, diarrhea, and muscle or joint pain. Individuals who experience these symptoms after receiving other vaccines are likely to experience the same with the RSV vaccine. In clinical trials, a small number of participants 60 and older developed a rare condition called Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS). However, CDC continues to monitor vaccine safety and has concluded that by reducing RSV-associated hospitalizations and death, the benefits of RSV vaccination outweigh potential risks.[6]

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/about/index.html
[2] https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/rsv/rsv-in-adults
[3] https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/adults/index.html
[4] https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/vaccines/adults.html
[5] https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-adults/recommended-vaccines/how-to-pay-adult-vaccines.html
[6] https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/vaccines/adults.html#cdc_vaccine_recommendations_who_should-what-are-the-possible-side-effects

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