

RSV

FACT SHEET



FOUNDATION
for a Healthy North Dakota

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Infection?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a common virus that causes respiratory illness in people of all ages. It is most common in winter and early spring but can occur year-round. RSV is the leading cause of hospitalization among U.S. infants, and it can also be dangerous for certain high-risk adults. Each year in the U.S., an estimated 60,000-120,000 older adults are hospitalized and 6,000-10,000 die from RSV infection.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

People infected with RSV usually show symptoms within 4 to 6 days after getting infected. Symptoms of RSV infection usually include:

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Decrease in appetite
- Fever
- Coughing
- Wheezing

The above symptoms do not appear all at once and usually in stages. In very young infants with RSV, the only symptoms may be irritability, decreased activity, and breathing problems.

How does RSV spread and who is most at risk for a severe case of RSV?

RSV can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and the virus droplets from the cough or sneeze get in the eyes, nose, or mouth of another person. RSV also spreads through surfaces that have the virus on it, such as a doorknob, and the uninfected person then touches their face before handwashing. Older adults and infants younger than 6 months of age are especially at risk for more serious illness and may need to be hospitalized if they are having trouble breathing or are dehydrated.

How can I prevent RSV?

There are currently RSV vaccines available for adults 60 years and older to help protect them from severe RSV illness.

Presently, there are two ways to protect your baby from becoming seriously ill with RSV. One is an RSV vaccine given during pregnancy sometime between 32-36 weeks of the pregnancy during RSV season, which typically runs September through January. Further, a dose of RSV antibody is recommended for babies younger than 8 months and born during, or entering, their first RSV season.

Resources:

1. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Health and Human Services North Dakota. (n.d.). <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/health/RSV>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023a, November 7). RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>

Why vaccinate against the RSV?

The RSV vaccines currently available for adults 60 years and older help protect them from serious cases of RSV that can lead to a lung infection or pneumonia.

The RSV vaccine during pregnancy or the RSV antibodies administered to infants protect babies and young children from severe disease from an RSV infection. The vaccine and antibody immunization provide an extra layer of defense to help fight RSV infections.

Where can I get the RSV vaccine?

Be sure to ask your healthcare provider or contact your clinic, local public health office, or pharmacist about the RSV vaccine and antibody treatment. You can also scan the following QR code for more information for infants and parents and older adults on the RSV vaccine and treatment.

