

Immunization Facts for Families

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

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There are two ways to protect babies from severe RSV disease. An immunization can be given to pregnant people near the end of pregnancy, or an RSV immunization can be given to babies. Either choice is very effective at preventing severe RSV disease.

The RSV immunization protects your child from:

- Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), a common virus that causes symptoms like a runny nose, decreased appetite, cough, sneezing, fever, and wheezing.
- Severe RSV disease, which can make it hard for your child to breathe and get enough oxygen.
- Hospitalization caused by a severe RSV infection, which can involve intensive care and needing a ventilator.

Why is RSV immunization recommended?

Infants are at highest risk for severe RSV during their first 6 months of life. RSV is the leading cause of infant hospitalization in the United States, with about 2–3 out of every 100 unimmunized infants who are younger than 3 months hospitalized each year.

RSV immunization is highly effective—about 90% effective at preventing hospitalization in infants.

Who should receive the RSV immunization and when?

All babies who are younger than 8 months old should get protection from RSV using one of these options:

Option 1: RSV immunization for the pregnant person

- In most of the US, RSV immunization for pregnant people is only administered between September and March.
- This immunization is given between 32–36 weeks of pregnancy.
- Pregnant people who received a dose of RSV immunization during a previous pregnancy should not get it again. Instead, the baby should receive the RSV immunization (see Option 2).
- Antibodies from the pregnant person are passed to the baby before birth.

Option 2: RSV immunization for babies

- In most parts of the US, RSV immunization for babies is only administered between October and March.

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- All babies who are less than 8 months old should receive RSV immunization if their birth parent did not receive RSV immunization during their pregnancy.
- RSV immunization may be administered in the hospital shortly after birth or at the doctor's office. The youngest babies are at highest risk of becoming seriously sick from RSV, so getting RSV immunization as soon as possible is recommended.
- RSV vaccine works immediately. Once your baby receives it, they are protected.

*Additional protection for some children with risk factors

- Some children between 8–19 months old with certain medical conditions, such as severe lung disease or a severely weakened immune system, may still be at higher risk. Their doctor may recommend an additional dose for extra protection.

How does RSV spread?

RSV spreads easily through the air and physical contact. It can spread:

- When droplets from a cough or sneeze get into the eyes, nose, or mouth or when touching a surface that is contaminated by these droplets and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Through close contact with someone who has RSV.
- RSV can live on hard surfaces for hours. Washing your hands often and avoiding close contact with sick people can help reduce the spread, but immunization offers the best protection against severe RSV.

What are the side effects of infant RSV immunization?

Some people may experience a rash, pain, redness, or swelling where the immunization was administered. Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own.

RSV immunization is safe, and serious side effects are rare. Talk to your child's doctor or care team if you have any questions or concerns.



Learn more

If you have questions about immunizations and keeping your child healthy, talk with your pediatrician. Visit www.healthychildren.org/RSV for more information on RSV immunizations from the AAP.

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