

Ministry of Health

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Fact Sheet for Vaccine Recipients

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This fact sheet gives basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle, or treatment.

## 1. What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory virus that is a major cause of illness among Ontarians. RSV can cause infection in the upper (e.g., nose and throat) and lower (e.g., lower airways and lungs) parts of a person's respiratory system.

## 2. Who is at risk of getting RSV?

RSV can be passed from one person to another through respiratory droplets (such as from a cough or sneeze), as with other respiratory viruses. RSV usually leads to a mild illness with cold-like symptoms (e.g., runny nose, coughing). However, some groups are more likely to have severe illness or complications, including children younger than two years of age, older adults, individuals with heart or respiratory conditions, and immunocompromised individuals.

## 3. What RSV vaccines are available for use in Canada?

Arexvy (manufactured by GSK) was authorized for use by Health Canada on August 4, 2023. This vaccine can be used in adults 60 years of age and older to prevent lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) caused by RSV.

#### **4. Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded RSV vaccine in Ontario?**

Ontario's publicly funded RSV prevention program is targeted for high risk individuals and settings. The program includes individuals 60 years and older who are:

- Living in long-term care homes
- Living in Elder Care Lodges
- Residents of retirement homes licensed to provide dementia care
- Patients in hospital receiving alternate level of care (ALC)
- Patients receiving hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis
- Recipients of solid organ or hematopoietic stem cell transplants
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis

Please speak with your health care provider or local public health unit if you have questions regarding eligibility.

#### **5. Is the vaccine safe and effective?**

Arexvy is safe and effective in reducing the risk of developing RSV-associated LRTD for individuals 60 years of age and older. Studies have shown that Arexvy is over 82% effective in preventing LRTD.

#### **6. What are the side effects of the RSV vaccine?**

Like any other vaccine or medication, the RSV vaccine may have some side effects, which in most cases are mild and last only a few days. Common side effects after the RSV vaccine can include pain, redness, and swelling where the shot is given, fatigue (feeling tired), fever, headache, nausea, diarrhea, and muscle or joint pain. It is important to discuss the benefits and risks of RSV vaccination with your health care provider.

In the studies conducted on the vaccine, there were very rare reports of serious neurologic conditions, including Guillain-Barré syndrome. It is unclear whether the vaccine caused these events.

As a new vaccine, post-market surveillance of vaccine safety will continue to provide details on the product.

**7. Can I receive the RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines?**

No, at this time, as a precaution, receiving the RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines is not recommended. It is advised to wait at least two weeks before or after getting an RSV vaccine to receive another vaccine product to prevent mistakenly connecting a reaction to one vaccine or the other.

**8. Can I still receive the RSV vaccine if I am sick?**

It is dependent on the severity of symptoms. If you have a fever, you should wait until symptoms have gone away before being vaccinated. Please speak to your health care provider if you are feeling sick before receiving the vaccine.

**9. What if I have had an RSV infection, how long do I have to wait before I can receive the RSV vaccine?**

There is no specific interval that is recommended between RSV infection and RSV vaccination. However, all your symptoms should go away before you receive the vaccine.

**10. What if I had a transplant? How long do I have to wait since the transplant to receive an RSV vaccine?**

It is recommended that patients wait 3-6 months post-transplant to receive an RSV vaccination. However, a minimum of 1 month post-transplant may be practiced at the discretion of the provider.

**11. Where can I find more information about the RSV vaccine?**

If you are looking for more information about RSV, the RSV vaccine, or the province's RSV vaccination program, please refer to the ministry's [RSV website](#) or contact your local public health unit. You may also contact your primary health care provider.