

# New vaccine to protect against RSV approved for use during pregnancy - Mothers passing on the gift of immune protection

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## Good News for 2024!

In Canada, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection rates increase from November through March. So far, we have seen the usual seasonal rise in RSV infections.<sup>1</sup> These rates are of special concern in recent years, since RSV-related illness in addition to high rates of flu and COVID-19 infections may increase demand on hospitals, clinics, and healthcare providers.

Now we have brand-new protection against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) – an old and highly contagious respiratory virus best known for affecting very young children. Early in January, Health Canada approved Abrysvo for prevention of lower respiratory tract illness caused by RSV in infants from birth through 6 months of age, through active immunization of pregnant individuals at 32 through 36 weeks gestational age. The vaccine is also approved for use in people 60 years and older.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the vaccine's approval, Dr. Darine El-Chaâr, Maternal Fetal Medicine physician at The Ottawa Hospital, said: "Vaccines administered through maternal immunization can also help play a critical role in decreasing the gap of vulnerability in the first few months of an infant's life, as well as helping to protect their mothers, who may be at increased risk of severe disease compared with non-pregnant women."<sup>2</sup>

RSV generally causes cold-like symptoms that resolve on their own. While anyone can catch RSV, about 90% of children have had the virus by their second birthday. These babies, and older adults over age 60, especially those in group settings or long-term care and those with underlying respiratory or cardiac conditions, are most likely to develop a serious infection.<sup>3</sup>

Now, individuals 60 years of age and up also have several vaccine options to prevent RSV infection and the related risk of developing lower respiratory tract disease. With its recent approval, Abrysvo joins the world's first [RSV vaccine - Arexvy, which received approval in August, 2023 for adults](#)

[aged 60 years and older.](#)

## Why is RSV a concern?

In very young babies, the only signs of infection may be irritability, reduced activity, and difficulties breathing.<sup>4</sup> Yet up to 40% of infants will develop a lower respiratory tract infection (LRTI) during their first episode of RSV. When the infection is severe, it can cause life-threatening lung conditions such as inflammation of the small airways in the lung (bronchiolitis), or pneumonia.<sup>3</sup>

Most RSV-related hospitalizations happen in otherwise healthy infants. In those who are younger than 6 months, or have risk factors such as coexisting health conditions or prematurity, RSV can lead to respiratory distress. And over the longer term, children who have recovered from a lower respiratory tract infection due to RSV are more likely to experience recurrent wheezing/asthma-like symptoms, or to develop childhood asthma.<sup>3</sup>

Prevention strategies include newer vaccines for maternal immunization (i.e. during pregnancy), vaccination of infants, and people age 60 and over, as well as antibody drugs, palivizumab (Synagis) and nirsevimab (Beyfortus), approved to prevent serious illness in babies at high risk due to chronic medical conditions or lung disease. Ask your physician or vaccine provider if you or your family would benefit from protection against RSV.<sup>3</sup>

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This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your doctor. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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### Sources

Note: the hyperlinks that direct to other sites are not continuously updated. It is possible that some links become untraceable over time. Thank you.

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10697103/>
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