

Ministry of Health

Older Adult High-Risk Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine Program Fact Sheet - Vaccine Recipients

Version 4.0 – August 14, 2024

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 or illness.

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.

Similar to other viruses that cause respiratory illness, RSV can be passed from one person to another through respiratory droplets (such as from a cough or sneeze). 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.

Vaccine Products

There are two vaccine products ([Table 1](#)) available in Canada to provide protection against lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) caused by RSV for individuals 60 years of age and older.

Table 1. Authorized RSV Vaccine Products.

| Vaccine | Arexvy | Abrysvo™ |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Manufacturer | GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) | Pfizer |
| Date of Authorization (Health Canada) | August 4, 2023 | December 21, 2023 |
| Type of Vaccine | Adjuvanted recombinant protein subunit | Bivalent recombinant protein subunit |
| Dosage | 1 dose (0.5 mL) | 1 dose (0.5 mL) |
| Route of Administration | Intramuscular (into the muscle, usually in the arm) | Intramuscular (into the muscle, usually in the arm) |
| Number of Doses (how often) | One dose* | One dose* |

* Currently, only a single dose is recommended by Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. Studies are ongoing to determine how long the protection lasts with a single dose of vaccine.

Eligibility for the 2024-2025 RSV Season

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

- Residents of long-term care homes, Elder Care Lodges, or retirement homes
- Patients in hospital receiving alternate level of care (ALC) including similar settings (e.g., complex continuing care, hospital transitional programs)
- 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.

Safety and Efficacy

Evidence supports the use of a single dose of either Arexvy or Abrysvo to help prevent RSV disease in adults 60 years of age and older.

Studies show multi-year protection. As such, if an individual received a dose of RSV vaccine during the 2023-2024 season, they do not need to receive another dose this season. The timing for subsequent doses is unknown at this time. Studies are ongoing to determine how long the vaccines provide protection.

Both vaccines are authorized by Health Canada and recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).

Both Arexvy and Abrysvo have been shown to be safe and demonstrated high effectiveness in preventing severe disease from RSV.

Co-Administration

The RSV vaccine can be co-administered with other seasonal vaccines and is encouraged to help mitigate the impacts of the respiratory season.

Contraindications and Precautions

- If you are **sick**:
 - You may still be able to receive an RSV vaccine, however, it is dependent on the severity of symptoms. Those with a severe acute illness with or without a fever should wait until symptoms have lessened before receiving an RSV vaccine. A minor illness, such as a cold, should not prevent you from receiving the vaccine. Please speak to a health care provider if you are feeling sick before receiving the vaccine.
- If you have had a previous RSV infection:
 - 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.
- If you have had a transplant (solid-organ or stem cell):
 - 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 used at the discretion of the provider.

Side Effects

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 as well as 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 clinical trials and subsequent studies conducted on the vaccine, there were rare reports of serious neurologic conditions, including Guillain-Barré syndrome. It is unclear whether the vaccine caused these events. The safety of these vaccines will continue to be monitored.

Individuals Not Eligible for a Publicly Funded Vaccine

Individuals aged 60 years and older who do not qualify for the publicly funded RSV vaccine program can obtain the vaccine at a pharmacy with a prescription from their primary care provider. Individuals who obtain the RSV vaccine at their local pharmacy will be required to pay out of pocket from the private market. The ministry does not reimburse for publicly funded vaccines or vaccines purchased from the private market. Some private insurers may cover all or part of the cost of the vaccine.

Additional Information

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.