

Fact Sheet

RSV Vaccination During Pregnancy



Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is highly contagious and spreads easily through coughs and sneezes. Almost all children will be infected by the virus before the age of two.

RSV is the number one cause of hospital admission for Australian children under five years of age.

Vaccinating pregnant women against RSV during late pregnancy significantly reduces the risk of a baby developing severe RSV disease in the first few months of life.

How the vaccine works

'Maternal immunity' is a natural phenomenon where pregnant women provide protection to their growing babies by transferring antibodies through the placenta, helping to protect the baby during the first months of life.

This process is critical for the health of the baby because a **newborn's immune system is underdeveloped at birth**, leaving them vulnerable to serious illness.

Being vaccinated against RSV during pregnancy triggers a mother's body to create **protective RSV-fighting antibodies** which are passed on to her unborn baby, helping to protect them during the first months of life when they are most vulnerable to the severe complications of RSV. It takes around two weeks for the mother to create and transfer these antibodies to the unborn baby, lasting from birth through to around six months of age.

Administration

The vaccine can only be administered by a healthcare professional – typically by a GP or at an antenatal clinic. It is a single injection administered in a woman's upper arm **during weeks 24 to 36 of pregnancy** in the lead-up to or during the RSV season.

In most of Australia, RSV commonly circulates from the **end of autumn to the start of spring**.

Benefits of RSV vaccination during pregnancy

A large clinical trial found that the RSV vaccination during pregnancy is safe and effective in protecting the pregnant woman and her baby from severe RSV disease.

Importantly, the study found the maternal RSV vaccine **reduced the risk of babies developing severe RSV by 82% in the first three months of life**, and by 69% within the first six months of life. It also found the vaccine reduced the risk of the baby being admitted to hospital for RSV by 68% in the first three months of life and 57% in the first six months of life.

Safety of RSV vaccination during pregnancy

Protecting babies by **immunising pregnant mothers is not a new concept**. It has been recommended for years that women receive whooping cough and influenza vaccines during pregnancy to help protect their babies during the newborn phase.

RSV vaccination during pregnancy is **generally safe and well tolerated**. The most common side effects include injection site pain, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, and stiffness in the joints. These typically don't last long.

Access to the RSV vaccine

The RSV vaccine for pregnant women has been **registered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration**.

It is hoped that in the future this vaccine will be funded and made available by the Australian Government through the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

For more information about RSV vaccination during pregnancy, please speak to a healthcare professional.

