

## Fact Sheet

# RSV Vaccination for Older Australians

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is highly contagious, causing seasonal outbreaks, usually during the winter months.

RSV spreads easily through coughs and sneezes and is a common cause of lower respiratory tract infections.

Older people, and especially those with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes and chronic heart and lung diseases, are at increased risk of severe RSV that may require admission to hospital.

### How the vaccine works

The body's immune system typically **weakens with older age and has a harder time fighting off infections**, including from RSV, than it does earlier in life.

For people aged 60 years or over, an adjuvanted **RSV vaccine boosts the body's protection** against severe RSV-related disease. It is designed to stimulate a strong immune response to protect against RSV in older people, in whom the immune system is typically weakened with age, and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

### Administration

The vaccine can only be administered by a healthcare professional – typically in a GP practice or pharmacy.

It is **administered to older Australians as a single dose injection** into the upper arm each year before the RSV

season commences to optimise protection against RSV and associated lung and lower airway infections.

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

### Benefits of RSV vaccination for older adults

A large clinical trial found that the vaccine **reduced the risk of lung and lower airway infection from RSV** by more than 82% in people aged 60 years and older compared to people who did not receive the vaccine.

It provided even **greater benefit in people who also have health conditions** including asthma, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic heart failure, advanced liver or kidney disease, or any chronic respiratory or pulmonary disease.

### Safety of RSV vaccination for older adults

The vaccine 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 Australians aged 60 and over has been **registered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and is available in Australia at a cost**. Private health insurance coverage may reduce the cost.

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

For more information about RSV vaccination in older Australians, please speak to a healthcare professional.

