

Older Adults Are at High Risk for Severe RSV Infection

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common virus that affects the lungs and breathing passages.

RSV infections can be dangerous for certain adults. Adults at the highest risk for severe RSV infection include:

- Older adults
- Adults with chronic heart or lung disease
- Adults with weakened immune systems
- Adults with certain other underlying medical conditions
- Adults living in nursing homes or long-term care facilities

Each year, it is estimated that between 60,000–120,000 older adults in the United States are hospitalized and 6,000–10,000 of them die due to RSV infection.

Severe RSV Infection

When an older adult gets RSV infection, that person typically has mild cold-like symptoms, including runny nose, sore throat, cough, and headache. But RSV can sometimes lead to serious conditions, such as:

- Pneumonia (infection of the lungs)
- More severe symptoms for people with asthma
- More severe symptoms for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a chronic disease of the lungs that makes it hard to breathe
- Congestive heart failure, when the heart cannot pump enough blood and oxygen through the body

Older adults who get very sick from RSV may need to be hospitalized. Some may even die. Older adults are at greater risk than young adults for serious complications from RSV because our immune system weakens when we get older.

How to protect yourself and loved ones

RSV circulation starts in the fall and peaks in the winter. If you are at high risk for severe RSV infection, or if you interact with an older adult, you should take extra care to keep them healthy, including:

- **Wash your hands often**
Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Washing your hands will help protect you from germs.
- **Keep your hands off your face**
Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Germs spread this way.
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick**
Avoid close contact, such as kissing, and sharing cups or eating utensils with people who have cold-like symptoms.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes**
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash afterward.
- **Clean and disinfect surfaces**
Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that people frequently touch, such as toys, doorknobs, and mobile devices. When people infected with RSV touch surfaces and objects, they can leave behind germs. Also, when they cough or sneeze, droplets containing germs can land on surfaces and objects.
- **Stay home when you are sick**
If possible, stay home from work, school, and public areas when you are sick. This will help protect others from catching your illness.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). RSV in Older Adults and Adults With Chronic Medical Conditions. Available at www.cdc.gov/rsv/high-risk/older-adults.html.