Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine

Public Health – Fact Sheet

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Immunizations help in eliminating and controlling the spread of infections and diseases. Vaccines help your immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) disease?

RSV is a common respiratory virus that follows an annual seasonal pattern, with increased activity in the fall and winter months and continues to early spring. This virus can spread from person to person through activities such as coughing, sneezing and talking. RSV may also spread by touching something that has the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands.

Most people infected with the virus will experience mild illness, with cold-like symptoms such as runny nose, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, fever and a decrease in appetite and energy. Sometimes RSV can cause pneumonia in older adults, particularly among those with underlying medical conditions, which can lead to severe illness and hospitalization.

What is the RSV Vaccine?

The RSV vaccine works by presenting our body with something that looks like RSV. Our immune system can then learn to fight the virus. This can protect you against an infection or serious illness if you are exposed to RSV in the future.

Who should get the RSV vaccine?

The RSV vaccine is available free of charge to eligible Manitobans 60 years of age or older residing in a personal care home. Please visit manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/vaccineeligibility.html for eligibility criteria.

If you have already received an RSV vaccine, there is currently no recommendation to get a second dose.

Who should NOT get the RSV vaccine?

Talk to your health-care provider prior to immunization if you:

- have had a severe allergic reaction after receiving a previous dose of an RSV vaccine; or
- are allergic to any contents of the vaccine.

Anyone with a high fever should postpone immunization until recovered. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

Can the RSV vaccine be administered on the same day as other vaccines?

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) currently supports the administration of the RSV vaccine at the same time as, or any time before or after, other vaccines. However, if possible, the RSV vaccine should be given at least six weeks before or after non-seasonal vaccines (e.g., shingles vaccine). This is because there is limited data on how your immune system would respond if you received the RSV vaccine at the same time as other vaccines.

Seasonal vaccines, such as influenza and COVID-19 vaccines, can be given at the same time as the RSV vaccine. Some studies suggest that RSV and influenza vaccines may not produce as strong of an immune response if they are given on the same day, but the clinical significance of this is unknown. Some studies have also shown that getting the influenza and RSV vaccine on the same day may cause an increase of common side-effects such as fever and soreness at the injection site.

What are the possible side-effects of the RSV vaccine?

Health Canada approves vaccines based on a review of quality and safety. It is common to experience soreness, redness or swelling where you got the vaccine. Other common side-effects of the RSV vaccine include fatigue, fever, headache and muscle or joint pain. These side-effects are usually mild and last one to two days. Acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness.

There are some indications that RSV vaccines may be associated with an increased risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a condition that can cause muscle weakness, numbness and paralysis) and atrial fibrillation (irregular and fast heartbeat that can lead to blood clots in the heart and brain).

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A severe allergic reaction is a serious but very rare side-effect of getting the vaccine. Symptoms could include hives, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat and face. It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine so you can be monitored. If symptoms occur after leaving the clinic, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate attention.

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Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a health-care provider.

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Your record of protection

All immunizations are recorded in a person's immunization record in Manitoba's Immunization Registry.

This registry enables:

- your health-care provider to find out which immunizations you or your child(ren) have received,

- the production of immunization records or notifications to you about overdue vaccines,

- public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease.

You can get your immunization record by submitting a request online via forms.gov.mb.ca/immunization-update-request. Your immunization record will be mailed to you. You may also be able to get a copy by:

- contacting your local public health office;

- checking if your local medical clinic or physician's office can provide it to you; or

- asking at a local nursing station or health centre.

For a listing of public health offices please visit:
manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and/or that of your child(ren). You can have your personal health information and/or that of your child(ren) hidden from view from health-care providers. For more information, please refer to manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/phims.html or contact your local public health office to speak with a public health nurse.

For more information on RSV disease and vaccines:

- talk to your health-care provider; or

- call Health Links–Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257; or

- visit:

Manitoba's Immunization Program website:
manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/index.html

Health Canada's RSV website:
canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv.html