

RSV Infection in Older Adults



Background

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a type of virus that can cause symptoms similar to those of a mild-cold. Symptoms may include a cough, sore throat, runny nose, or fever and typically do not persist for long periods of time. However, symptoms may not be as mild for older adult patients and RSV can lead to more severe patient outcomes in this group. Older adults infected with RSV may even experience pneumonia or a worsening of already present respiratory diseases such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

RSV Season and Risk Factors

In addition to recognizing the symptoms and potential outcomes of RSV in older adults, it is important to understand when patients are most at risk for developing this virus. RSV is most prevalent during the latter part of the year, with infections beginning in the fall months and reaching their peak during the winter season. With between 60,000 to 160,000 hospitalizations each year in the United States and up to 10,000 deaths in adults over 60 years old, it is also important to recognize which pre-existing conditions can place a patient at greater risk for severe infection. Adults over 60 with lung diseases (asthma or COPD), heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, neurological disorders, or those with compromised immunity are most at risk for severe RSV infections. Additionally, residents of nursing homes or long-term care facilities are at a greater risk of developing a severe RSV infection as well.

Vaccination and Reducing the Risk of RSV

To help prevent the spread of RSV, typical personal hygiene measures are recommended. Frequent handwashing, covering of coughs or sneezes properly, disinfecting of surfaces, and avoiding close contact with those infected can help fight the spread. In addition to these measures, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has also recently approved 2 new RSV vaccines, Arexvy and Abrysvo for use in adults ages 60 years and older. So far, these vaccines have demonstrated moderate to high effectiveness in preventing severe RSV infection in this patient population. Currently, these vaccines only require a single injection, but additional research is being performed to determine if booster doses should be recommended in the future.

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