

VACCINATION FOR ADULTS



STRATEGY INTRO: Increase demand for, and access to flu, COVID-19, and other adult vaccinations via 40 pop-up community clinics at the places that cultural groups feel comfortable and connected, and increase regularity of vaccine promotion in priority communities; and increase the percentage of pan-Asian and pan-African seniors who are up-to-date with recommended adult vaccinations.

PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES: WHY RSV VACCINATION MATTERS FOR BIPOC FAMILIES IN MINNESOTA FOR THE COMING FALL

As Minnesota's fall approaches, families across our diverse communities are preparing for seasonal health challenges. This year, there's a powerful new tool available to protect our most vulnerable loved ones: RSV vaccination. For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in Minnesota, understanding and accessing RSV vaccines could be a critical step in safeguarding family health.

UNDERSTANDING RSV: MORE THAN JUST A COLD

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) might sound like just another seasonal illness, but for many families in our communities, it represents a serious health threat. RSV causes symptoms similar to a common cold in healthy adults, but it can lead to severe breathing problems, hospitalization, and **even life-**



threatening complications in infants, older adults, and people with underlying health conditions.

The statistics are sobering: RSV is the leading cause of hospitalization among infants in the United States, responsible for between 58,000 and 80,000 hospitalizations of young children and between 60,000 and 160,000 hospitalizations of seniors nationwide in an average year. In Minnesota, our state has become a leader in RSV surveillance and research, actively tracking hospitalized patients with RSV across all counties as of the 2023-2024 season, with particularly detailed monitoring in the 7-county metropolitan area (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties).

What's particularly concerning is that BIPOC children and adults often face higher rates of severe RSV outcomes due to a combination of factors including healthcare access barriers, underlying health conditions, and social determinants of health.

The infographic consists of two side-by-side panels, each featuring a photo of an older man in a white shirt. The left panel is in English and the right panel is in Chinese. Both panels describe RSV symptoms and recovery. The English text states: 'RSV can cause illness in people of all ages but may be especially serious for infants and older adults. Symptoms of RSV infection may include runny nose, decreased appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever, or wheezing. In very young infants, symptoms of RSV may also include irritability (fussiness), decreased activity, or apnea (pauses in breathing for more than 10 seconds). Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can be more serious, resulting in shortness of breath and low oxygen levels.' The Chinese text states: 'RSV 可导致所有年龄段的人患病，但对婴儿和老年人来说可能尤其严重。RSV 感染的症状可能包括流鼻涕、食欲下降、咳嗽、打喷嚏、发热或喘鸣。在非常年幼的婴儿中，RSV 的症状还可能包括易激惹（烦躁）、活动减少或呼吸暂停（呼吸暂停超过 10 秒）。大多数人在一两周内就会康复，但 RSV 可能更严重，会导致呼吸急促和低氧水平。'

WHY BIPOC COMMUNITIES FACE HIGHER RSV RISKS

Research consistently shows that structural inequities contribute to disproportionate health outcomes in our communities. Several factors make BIPOC families in Minnesota particularly vulnerable to severe RSV:

- **Healthcare Access Challenges:** Many families face barriers to timely medical care, including lack of insurance, transportation difficulties, or limited availability of culturally competent healthcare providers. This can mean delayed treatment when RSV symptoms develop.
- **Higher Rates of Underlying Conditions:** BIPOC communities experience higher rates of asthma, diabetes, and heart disease – conditions that can make RSV infections more severe and dangerous.
- **Social and Economic Factors:** Families living in crowded housing, working in essential jobs without sick leave, or facing food insecurity may have limited ability to isolate when illness strikes, increasing transmission risk.
- **Historical Medical Mistrust:** Generations of medical discrimination have understandably created hesitancy about new medical interventions in many of our communities.

NEW HOPE: RSV VACCINES ARE HERE

The good news is that for the first time, we have safe and effective vaccines to prevent RSV. The FDA has approved RSV vaccines for adults 75 and older (and those 50-74 at increased risk), pregnant people (to protect their newborns), and infants have a new preventive monoclonal antibody treatment called nirsevimab.

These vaccines have undergone rigorous testing and have been shown to significantly reduce severe RSV disease. Clinical trials included diverse participants, and the results show strong protection across racial and ethnic groups.

Encouragingly, early national data from the 2024-25 respiratory virus season shows that infant hospitalization rates for RSV were 28% to 43% lower than previous years, marking the first season with broad availability of maternal RSV vaccines and preventive treatments for infants. While Minnesota participates in this national surveillance, these reductions reflect nationwide trends.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: MAKING VACCINATION ACCESSIBLE

Minnesota's health departments and community organizations are working to ensure RSV vaccines reach all communities equitably. Here's what you need to know:



- **Insurance Coverage:** Most insurance plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, cover RSV vaccines. If you're uninsured, ask about sliding-scale fees or assistance programs.
- **Where to Get Vaccinated:** RSV vaccines are available at pharmacies, community health centers, tribal health facilities, and healthcare provider offices throughout Minnesota. Many locations offer extended hours and multilingual services.
- **Cultural Intelligence:** Seek out healthcare providers who understand your community's experiences and can answer questions in a way that respects your cultural background and concerns.
- **Community Support:** Connect with trusted community leaders, faith organizations, and local health advocates who can provide accurate information and support your decision-making process.

ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

Protecting our communities from RSV isn't just about individual decisions – it's about collective action. When more people in our neighborhoods are vaccinated, we create layers of protection that benefit everyone, especially those who are most vulnerable. It's natural to have questions about a new vaccine. Here are some common concerns

and evidence-based responses:

- **"Is it safe?"** - RSV vaccines have undergone the same rigorous safety testing as all vaccines. Side effects are typically mild, such as soreness at the injection site or mild fatigue.
- **"Do I really need it?"** - If you're pregnant, over 60, or have young children or grandchildren, RSV vaccination can provide significant protection for you and your family.
- **"Can I trust the research?"** - The vaccine trials included participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and ongoing monitoring continues to confirm safety and effectiveness across all groups.

MAKING THE DECISION THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY

Deciding whether to get vaccinated is a personal choice that should be made in consultation with healthcare providers you trust. Don't wait, consider having conversations with:

- Your primary care provider or your children's pediatrician
- Minnesota Department of Health's Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division at 651-201-5414
- Community health workers who understand your family's specific cultural/linguistic circumstances
- Trusted friends and family members who have researched the issue
- Faith leaders or community elders whose judgment you value

Remember, getting accurate information from trusted sources is the first step in making the best decision for your family's health. This fall, let's work together to protect our communities from RSV and build a healthier future for all Minnesotans.

The health and wellbeing of BIPOC communities in Minnesota depends on our collective action and informed decision-making. RSV vaccination represents an important opportunity to protect our most vulnerable family members and strengthen our communities' resilience against preventable disease.

