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UK Launches Targeted RSV Vaccination Drive to Shield High-Risk Groups Ahead of Winter

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In preparation for an expected rise in respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cases this winter, the United Kingdom is expanding its vaccination campaign to better protect vulnerable groups. The move follows a significant surge in RSV infections during Australia's recent winter season, prompting public health officials to take early preventive steps.

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a contagious respiratory pathogen that primarily affects the lungs and airways. While typically mild in healthy adults, RSV can lead to serious complications in infants and older adults, particularly those aged 75 and above. It remains

one of the top causes of hospital admissions for children worldwide, often resulting in bronchiolitis, an inflammation of the small airways in the lungs.

According to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), children hospitalized with RSV in England last winter accounted for nearly 7,000 bed days. In response, the National Health Service (NHS) is stepping up efforts to promote vaccinations ahead of the flu season.

Kate Brintworth, Chief Midwifery Officer for NHS England, urged pregnant women to take action early. “Getting vaccinated while pregnant is the best way to protect your baby from the moment they are born,” she said. “Now is the time for moms to act, to make sure their babies are protected ahead of their first few months this winter, when there tends to be more bugs circulating.”

Expectant mothers can receive the RSV vaccine from 28 weeks of pregnancy through maternity services or general practice (GP) clinics. Research from the UKHSA shows that the maternal RSV vaccine can reduce newborn hospitalizations by 72% when administered at least 14 days before delivery.

Older adults are also a focus of the campaign. Those aged 75 to 79 are being offered the RSV vaccine, with invitations sent via post, email, text message, and through the NHS App. The vaccine is reported to be about 82% effective in preventing hospitalizations among this age group, making it a key part of the NHS’s winter preparedness strategy.

To increase accessibility, approximately 100 community pharmacies in regions such as the East of England and the Midlands are already administering the RSV vaccine. NHS England aims to expand availability to 150 more sites, particularly in areas with limited healthcare access.

These pharmacies are also offering the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine to pregnant women, helping to improve immunization rates while reducing strain on general practice clinics.

As part of broader public health guidance, the NHS continues to recommend seasonal flu and pertussis vaccinations for expectant mothers. Both vaccines have shown strong results in protecting mothers and newborns during peak illness seasons.

Officials hope that early and widespread vaccination will ease pressure on the healthcare system and provide critical protection to those most at risk from RSV as winter approaches.

