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## UK Boosts RSV Vaccination Access to Safeguard At-Risk Groups Ahead of Winter

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The United Kingdom is expanding the availability of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine in anticipation of a seasonal rise in infections. Following a sharp spike in RSV cases during Australia's winter, British health officials are urging early preventive action to protect high-risk groups, particularly pregnant women and adults over 75.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common, highly contagious respiratory infection that can cause bronchiolitis, or inflammation of the small airways in the lungs. While it generally produces mild, cold-like symptoms in healthy individuals, RSV can lead to serious illness in

infants and older adults. Globally, it is one of the leading causes of pediatric hospitalizations.

Data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the government agency responsible for protecting public health from infectious disease, shows that RSV-related hospitalizations in children accounted for nearly 7,000 pediatric bed days in England last winter. In response, the National Health Service (NHS) is stepping up efforts to mitigate pressure on hospitals through a targeted vaccination strategy.

Kate Brintworth, Chief Midwifery Officer for NHS England, highlighted the importance of maternal vaccination in reducing infant hospital admissions. “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.”

The maternal RSV vaccine is available from 28 weeks of pregnancy and can be accessed through maternity services or general practice (GP) clinics. According to UKHSA research, when given at least 14 days before delivery, the vaccine can reduce RSV-related newborn hospitalizations by up to 72%.

The campaign also extends to older adults, specifically those aged 75 to 79. Eligible individuals are being contacted via mail, email, text message, and the NHS App. Clinical studies show the vaccine is approximately 82% effective in preventing hospitalizations in this age group, making it a key element of the government’s winter health strategy.

To widen access, around 100 community pharmacies in the East of England and the Midlands are already administering RSV vaccines. NHS England plans to add 150 more pharmacy locations, particularly in areas where access to healthcare services is limited.

Many of these pharmacies are also offering the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine to eligible pregnant women. This coordinated effort is aimed at improving vaccination uptake and reducing strain on GP clinics.

Alongside RSV protection, the NHS is urging expectant mothers to receive flu and pertussis immunizations, both of which have proven effective in reducing risks to maternal and newborn health during the winter months.

Health officials remain focused on preventing avoidable hospitalizations and alleviating pressure on healthcare systems. By expanding access to RSV vaccines now, authorities aim to safeguard the most vulnerable populations before infection rates climb with the colder weather.