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Surge in RSV Cases Prompts UK Vaccination Push for Vulnerable Groups

August 5, 2025

– Categories: Breaking News



The United Kingdom may soon face a notable uptick in cases of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), according to health experts monitoring global trends. A significant increase in RSV infections during the Australian winter has prompted health authorities in England to strengthen public health messaging in advance of the colder months, especially towards those considered most vulnerable to complications.

RSV is a highly contagious virus and a leading cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lungs) in infants. While it typically causes only mild, cold-like symptoms

in healthy adults, it poses serious risks to babies and individuals aged over 75. It is also one of the primary causes of child hospital admissions globally.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), responsible for protecting public health from infectious diseases and environmental hazards, reported that RSV-related hospitalisations in children accounted for nearly 7,000 bed days in England during the previous winter. In light of these figures, NHS England is encouraging preventative measures ahead of the coming flu season.

Kate Brintworth, Chief Midwifery Officer for NHS England, emphasised the importance of maternal vaccination. “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 mums 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.”

Vaccination is available to expectant mothers from 28 weeks of gestation via maternity services or general practice (GP) surgeries. Research published by UKHSA indicates the maternal RSV vaccine can reduce hospital admissions in newborns by 72% when administered at least 14 days before delivery.

Older adults, particularly those aged between 75 and 79, are also being offered the jab. Invitations are being sent via post, text message, email, and through the NHS App. The vaccine is approximately 82% effective in preventing hospitalisation in older age groups, making it a key component of this year’s winter immunisation strategy.

In addition to availability at GP surgeries, around 100 community pharmacies in regions such as the East of England and the Midlands are currently offering the RSV vaccine, with NHS England aiming to extend this service to 150 additional sites. The focus is on areas where access may be limited, ensuring those eligible can receive protection conveniently.

Many of these pharmacies will also administer the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine to eligible pregnant women, helping improve uptake rates while easing the pressure on general practice appointments.

As part of broader efforts to encourage seasonal vaccinations, the NHS continues to recommend that pregnant women also consider the flu and whooping cough jabs, both of

which have proven track records in safeguarding the health of both mothers and babies during the winter months.

Health officials hope these proactive measures will mitigate the impact of RSV on the NHS this winter, while ensuring those most at risk are protected.