Why RSV is so dangerous for older adults in Europe

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) causes seasonal respiratory disease that can pose a serious risk to older adults.[1] RSV is transmitted from an infected person through the air or via surfaces, for example when they cough or sneeze.[2]

Symptoms are similar to those of flu and include cold, cough and wheezing.[1] In serious cases, RSV can lead to pneumonia.[3]

Among older adults, RSV is associated with rates of serious illness and death at least as high as flu, especially in those with existing heart and lung conditions.[4,5]

In 2015, RSV was responsible for an estimated:[5]

1.5m
episodes among people over 65 years old in high-income countries

336,000
hospitalisations globally

38
in-hospital deaths per day globally

RSV is especially dangerous for older people and people with existing health conditions

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, RSV accounted for **1 in 10** acute respiratory cases in adults.[6]

Older adults are at risk of **longer and more serious illness** from RSV than younger people.[7]

70% of people in hospital with RSV have one or more health conditions.[8] **Transplant patients** and adults with **cancer, COPD, heart failure** or **chronic kidney disease** are also at greater risk of severe RSV infection.[9,10]

Almost **a third** of people aged 75 and over who are hospitalised with RSV **die within a year of admission.**[11]

Managing RSV in older adults is costly

RSV inpatient costs account for up to 64% of total costs of care for older adults over a year due to the infection triggering other costly healthcare visits.[8,11]

An older person with serious RSV spends around **10 days in hospital.**[12-13] Up to **1 in 5** of these people require ventilation support.[11]

Around 60% of people who are hospitalised require additional care either at home or from nursing facilities or hospices.[11]

Reducing the impact of RSV on older adults and health systems in Europe requires action in four areas[14]

Surveillance

Diagnosis

Infection prevention and control

Treatment

A full policy report on the effect of RSV on older adults and health systems in Europe will be published in 2023.

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The Health Policy Partnership

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