



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

**Health technology assessment of
immunisation against respiratory
syncytial virus (RSV) in Ireland:
Plain language summary
RSV immunisation of older adults**

Publication date: 28 April 2026

About the Health Information and Quality Authority

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent statutory body established to promote safety and quality in the provision of health and social care services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the public.

Reporting to the Minister for Health and engaging with relevant government Ministers and departments, HIQA has responsibility for the following:

- **Setting standards for health and social care services** — Developing person-centred standards and guidance, based on evidence and international best practice, for health and social care services in Ireland.
- **Regulating social care services** — The Chief Inspector of Social Services within HIQA is responsible for registering and inspecting residential services for older people and people with a disability, and children’s special care units.
- **Regulating health services** — Regulating medical exposure to ionising radiation.
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- **Health technology assessment** — Evaluating the clinical and cost effectiveness of health programmes, policies, medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic and surgical techniques, health promotion and protection activities, and providing advice to enable the best use of resources and the best outcomes for people who use our health service.
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- **National Care Experience Programme** — Carrying out national service-user experience surveys across a range of health and social care services, with the Department of Health and the HSE.

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Plain language summary: RSV immunisation of older adults

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common virus that affects the lungs and upper airways. The RSV season in Ireland usually runs from October to March, with outbreaks every winter.

In healthy people, RSV infection can usually be managed without needing to see a doctor. However, RSV can cause more severe infections in some people, and they may need hospital care.

Older adults, particularly those with chronic heart or lung disease or who live in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes are at increased risk of severe disease from RSV.

What did we look at?

We looked at the impact of vaccinating older adults aged 65 years and older against RSV infection.

There are currently three vaccines available for older adults.

This assessment will help the Department of Health make a decision on RSV vaccination for older adults.

Do similar immunisation programmes exist in other countries?

Eight countries have recently introduced programmes for older adults, but the age group that is being offered the vaccine differs between these countries. Two of the countries only offer the vaccine to older adults with certain chronic conditions or who live in long-term care facilities.

What did we find?

RSV infection is very common in Ireland with outbreaks every winter. More than 1,200 people aged 65 years and older are diagnosed with RSV infection each year. On average, 120 older adults are hospitalised because of RSV each year. Other older adults with underlying health conditions such as heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may need to be hospitalised to manage their condition after an RSV infection. They may also have to stay in hospital for longer if they get infected while in hospital. People aged 80 years and older make up nearly half of all recorded cases and hospitalisations in older adults. Some hospitalised patients need rehabilitation services and support after they are discharged.

RSV immunisation is safe in older adults. Serious side effects are rare. However, minor reactions are common. These include pain where the injection is given, tiredness, and muscle pain. We found that immunisation reduces the chances that older adults will need to see a doctor if they catch the virus. It also reduces the risk that they will require hospital care. Although immunisation is effective when people first receive it, the benefit decreases over time.

We looked at the impact of vaccinating older adults. Vaccination would reduce the number of people that need medical care and hospital care. However, it would also cost a lot of money, even when we take into account the money saved because fewer people have to go to their GP or are admitted to hospital. If vaccination is offered to adults aged 80 years and older, it would cost the HSE €70 million over five years.

Offering vaccination to older adults would only be cost effective if the HSE can negotiate much lower prices for the vaccines. The HSE should aim to ensure that resources are used to achieve the best possible outcomes for the whole population.

**Published by the Health Information and Quality Authority
(HIQA).**

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