VACCINATIVE | Vaccination information for Natives by Natives

Protecting Against RSV

Our ancestors taught us the importance of caring for one another and prioritizing the well-being of our communities. One way Elders can protect themselves and others is by getting vaccinated against RSV. RSV is a quick-spreading virus that causes symptoms in people of all ages ranging from mild cough to difficulty breathing and severe lung infections. It is especially dangerous for infants and Elders.

This handout is designed to help you understand the ins and outs of RSV, so you can take care of yourself, your family, and your community.

"For the wellbeing of your immune system, get the RSV vaccine. I have witnessed a family member suffer with RSV in the hospital, and it hurts to watch. By making sure that everyone who can get vaccinated against RSV does, we can continue to build a healthier community."

– Cu-se-ma-at "Cathy Ballew," Lummi Nation Elder

What is RSV?

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common illness that affects our lungs and breathing passages. It usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can cause severe infection and difficulty breathing in certain individuals.

Common RSV Symptoms

People with RSV commonly show symptoms that include:

- Runny nose
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing
- Decreased appetite

How RSV Spreads

RSV spreads when:

- An infected person coughs or sneezes and you breathe in the air droplets
- You touch a surface with droplets on it, then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth
- You have direct contact, like kissing, with someone who has RSV

"Symptoms of RSV usually appear in stages rather than all at once. Some people with RSV develop life-threatening symptoms, like trouble breathing and severe lung infection."

– Clay Kills First, PharmD, BCOP
Oglala Lakota an Mnicoujou Lakota, Oregon Health & Science University, Clinical Faculty Oncology Pharmacist

> “Don’t let your guard down. RSV can result in serious illness, but we can all do things to prevent infection. The behaviors that we’ve learned to protect ourselves from other respiratory illnesses, like COVID-19 and flu, can be life saving. For those who are eligible for an RSV vaccine, this will provide another layer of protection.”
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> – Tam Lutz, MPH, MHA, Lummi Nation Elder & NPAIHB MCH & Vaccine Programs Director

Those at Higher Risk

Certain individuals have a higher risk of getting RSV and a more severe infection. People at higher risk include:

- Infants and young children
- Older adults, especially those ages 65 and older
- People with chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease
- People with weakened immune systems

Protecting Yourself and Your Family

Like with other respiratory illnesses, you can protect yourself and others by washing your hands regularly, not touching your face before washing your hands, and avoiding close contact (e.g., kissing, shaking hands, sharing eating utensils) with others. However, getting vaccinated is one of the best ways Elders can protect themselves and others.

How the Shot Works

Within our bodies, each of us has warrior cells that stand guard and attack diseases. When we get the RSV vaccine, the ingredients in the shot tell our warrior cells how to recognize and fight RSV. If you get the RSV vaccine, you are less likely to get sick with RSV. It can also reduce the seriousness of illness if you happen to get sick.

Shot Side Effects

People who get the RSV vaccine may have mild side effects, like fever or soreness, that go away in a few days. Mild side effects are a good sign that your warrior cells are preparing to be able to recognize and fight disease.

Where to Get Vaccinated

To get vaccinated contact your local Tribal clinic, IHS facility, or visit a local pharmacy or clinic.

VacciNative

This handout was developed by VacciNative – a project dedicated to creating accurate vaccine information for Native people by Native people. We do this by gathering info from trusted Elders, Native health professionals, and other experts. All of our materials are reviewed by the VacciNative Alliance, a collaboration of staff from Tribal Epidemiology Centers across the nation.

Additional Information

For additional information, check out www.IndianCountryECHO.org/VacciNative. For questions, contact us at VacciNative@npaihb.org.

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