



# UNITE AGAINST RSV



**Immunisation**  
Foundation of Australia  
Supporting Immunisation, Saving Lives

# TIMELINE

A growing interest in RSV

**2015**

Riley (1 month old) passed away from pertussis.

“Light For Riley” campaign commenced, highlighting dangers of respiratory infections in babies.



**2016**

Lucy (3 weeks old) hospitalised with RSV



**2017**

Established the Immunisation Foundation of Australia



**2022**

Began involvement in RSV research (Community Awareness Mapping, STAMP).

Co-chair of RSV+ Community Advisory Group



**2023**

Launched “RSV and Me” campaign

Established Australia’s first RSV Awareness Week.



**2024**

Launched “Unite Against RSV” campaign.





**Unite Against RSV calls on Australians of all ages and from all parts of the country to work together to embrace a new opportunity for RSV protection, reducing the impact of RSV on our most vulnerable.**





**RSV is the leading cause of hospitalisation in Australian infants**





**Awareness**

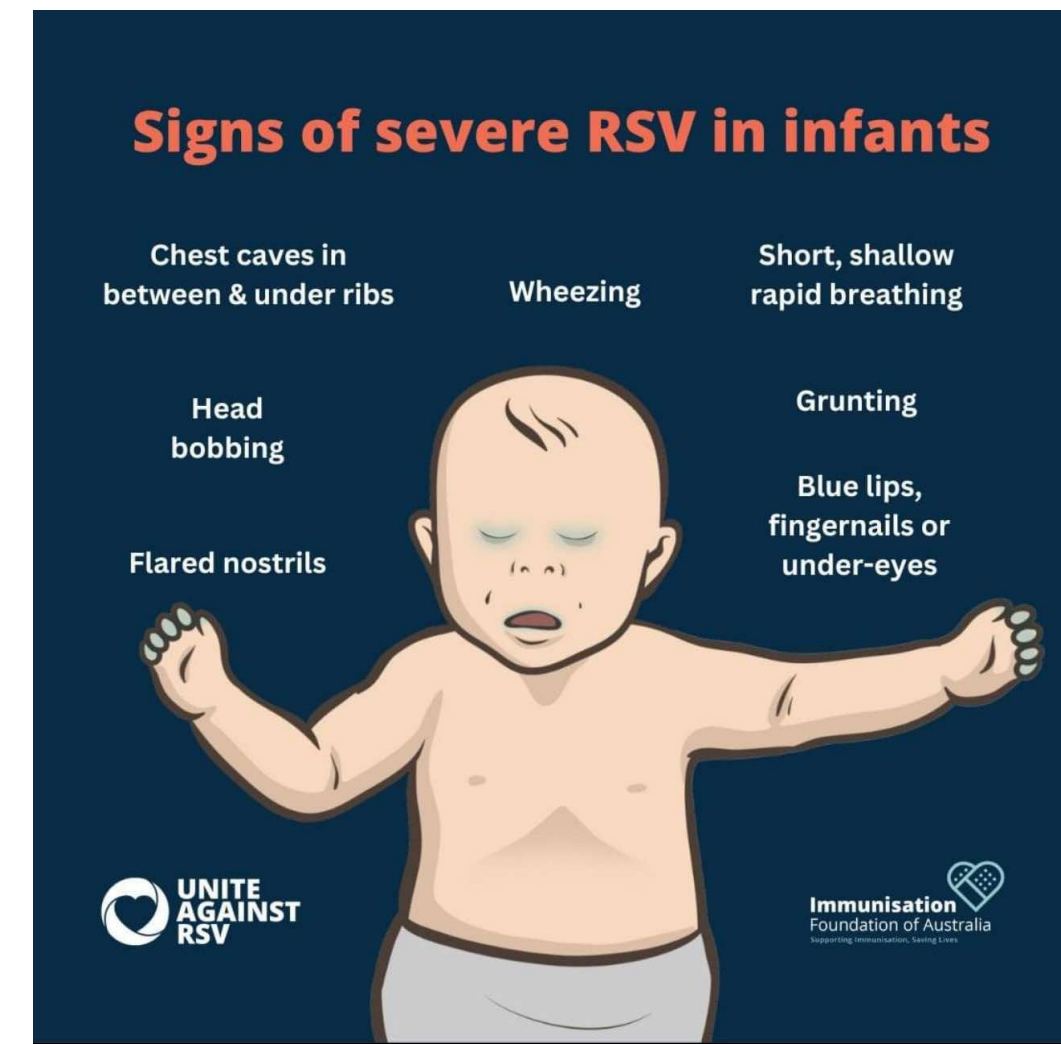


**Access**



**Acceptance**





# BABIES' LIVES BET ON 'POSTCODE LOTTERY'

Sue Dunlevy

A postcode lottery affecting the rollout of a lifesaving new childhood vaccine for the Respiratory Syncytial Virus infection could come to an end next month.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), a government committee that decides which medicines are subsidised, will consider whether to fund pharmaceutical company Sanofi Aventis's RSV immunisation Beyfortus in July.

Currently only two states fund the jab for all newborns.

It comes as we can reveal, at the start of winter, Australia has already recorded 45,120 cases of RSV in babies – 69 per cent of the total number of RSV cases in 2023.

The common cold-like virus is the number one reason small children are hospitalised and it has claimed the lives of more

than 21 preschoolers in the last decade. Nearly 12,000 Australian babies are likely to be hospitalised with it this year at a cost of nearly \$200 million.

The immunisation treatment was approved for use in Australia last November but the federal Government has not yet funded the \$350-per-jab medicine.

Two states – Queensland and Western Australia – decided to fund it themselves in anticipation of saving millions by keeping sick babies out of hospital.

In NSW, babies only receive the immunisation if they were born premature, Indigenous or born with a chronic condition.

Victoria rejected an approach by Sanofi to place an order for the new drug and only high-risk children in hospital can receive it in that state. In South Australia, Tas-

mania, the ACT and the Northern Territory RSV immunisation

So, parents of ren face a postcode they want their ki

The injection i bies at birth and t

ection against th least five months. It generates im living antibody into the body.

Carly Goya kn the desperation o loved child to a n fection and is p politicians to roll RSV immunisatio

The Queensla her six-month-ol to a respirator pneumococcal di "She got a strai covered in the (pr vaccine. And she ally sick and unfol lost her when she half months old



Carly Goya with her triplets Auggie, Ella and Owen and big sister Ruby.

DAYS 5  
MENTIONS 144  
POTENTIAL REACH 7.28 M  
ASR AUD 1.24 M



**GOLD COAST HEALTH WARNING FOR PARENTS**  
ADVICE TO KNOW RSV SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

# Lives bet on postcode lottery

Call for access to virus jabs

George Yankovich

Cases of a life-threatening respiratory virus, the vaccine for



Whatever postcode you're in, you should have access to a free vaccine

Catherine Hughes  
Immunisation Foundation

Beyfortus. Ms Hughes said while her daughter recovered that was not always the case. "We have about 12,000 babies hospitalised in Australia every year," she said.

"It's hard for parents seeing their babies having breathing difficulties and going through all this pain."

An NT Health spokeswoman said the department was waiting on national guidance for the implementation of any new RSV vaccine program. She said the spread could be reduced by covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands often, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and staying home while sick.

"There is no specific treatment for RSV... Children with mild disease should have lots of rest and lots of fluids," she said.

In the year to date, 47,000 children under the age of five have been infected across Aus-



ing a photo of their son Riley, who died of whooping cough at just four weeks old.

ntifiable Disease Surveillance System. The virus is transmitted by contact or fluids, with young children who contract RSV in 2016 – hopes the vaccine would become readily available across the country for children under five.

Ms Hughes – who lost her infant son Riley in 2015 to whooping cough, and experienced the hospitalisation of her young daughter who contracted RSV in 2016 – hopes the vaccine would become readily available across the country for children under five.

Ms Hughes said the status not "really equitable". "Whatever postcode you're in, you should have access to a free vaccine," Ms Hughes said.

However, this could change next month when the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee – which decides which medicines are subsidised – decides whether to fund

## Cough it up

With a health system under pressure, the NT government should stump up for vital jab

The Northern Territory government should follow the footsteps of Queensland and Western Australia in stumping up the funds to subsidise an expensive jab that affects thousands of children each year.

Cases of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) are on the up in the Northern Territory and the illness is currently expected to cost the nation about \$200m with an expected 12,000 infant patients needing hospitalisation this year.

However, the Northern Territory is among four states and territories which do not offer a subsidy for the jab.

Each dose of the jab costs \$350, and already this year, cases in the Northern Territory have almost doubled from 599 in 2023 to 1000 in 2024.

In an economic environment where every dollar, every cent counts – \$350 is a lot of money, even if it carries the benefit of assisting in protecting your child's health.

Ironically, in New South Wales, the jab is only offered to babies if they meet three criteria. That they're born premature, living with

Indigenous. With such a strong population of Indigenous young people in varying locations across the expansive Northern Territory, would it not be prudent to follow suit?

In Victoria, only children who are classed as high-risk can receive the jab.

But there may be some hope on the horizon for parents across the country next month when the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee – the federal government body which has the final say as to whether a medicine is subsidised or not – will consider the RSV jab.

When the fear of Covid-19 was fresh and the beacon of hope came in the form of a viable vaccine, the Australian public were not expected to pay a cent.

With NT Health consistently under pressure from issues spanning staff levels to inadequate bed numbers, the NT government should have done everything to ensure locals had the option of accessing a subsidised vaccine.

Would it not make sense to prevent the problem (infants pooling into already busy

# Making dent in kids RSV

WA's infant immunisation program having a dramatic impact

CLAIRE SADLER

WA is reporting lower rates of RSV cases and hospital admissions



op pneumonia or bronchiolitis.

"Without immunisation, we know that around 12,000 Australian babies are hospitalised with pneumonia and bronchiolitis caused by RSV each year, with one-in four requiring intensive care," Immunisation Foundation of Australia director Catherine Hughes said.

"Hospitalisation data from Western Australia shows a low rate of infant admission due to RSV for this time of the year. The message is clear – infant RSV immunisation keeps babies out of hospital."

Despite the lower rates of RSV in young children, Perth epidemiologist associate professor

severe RSV.

"The doctor examined my son and said you just need to go right now to emergency as he is not breathing properly and is working extremely hard to breathe," Ms Woolf said.

"I ended up taking both kids in with me to the hospital. My daughter was happy and eating well but they examined her anyway and it was actually her that they were most worried about in the end with her breathing, which was really scary."

"They both were admitted and both put on all different forms of oxygen because their oxygen just kept dropping."

"It was after admission when we were sent home to manage on

It's not sustainable to have infant immunisation programs in some states and not others



NEWS FIRST / PROF. MARGIE DANCHIN IMMUNISATION EXPERT

RSV Awareness Week couldn't come soon enough as cases surge

Almost two thirds of the total number of cases in 2023 have already been recorded in 2024, as experts predict an even greater winter surge.

Olivia Eden Wageningen

## AMA chief's emotional plea for RSV vaccination

Drew David

As a leading Canberra paediatrician, Australian Medical Association President Drew David is used to holding his breath.

But when his son Tim, now a healthy 16-year-old, contracted respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) as a toddler, Professor David was known to have death in his face.

"I had a gut emotional, literally to this day, thinking about how we almost lost him," Professor David said. "It was quite possibly the most extraordinarily distressing thing I've been through with my family and, you know, I will find it traumatic."

Now, with RSV sweeping here with the nation's hospital systems, the federal government is considering being a number of vaccines to prevent the spread of viral infections on the Pediatric Centre of Excellence Scheme and National Immunisation Schedule. This would make these available through an at no cost to those most vulnerable.

in the Northern Territory government should follow the footsteps of Queensland and Western Australia in stumping up the funds to subsidise an expensive jab that affects thousands of children each year.

Professor Rubens recalls his own being on a ventilator for weeks in the Canberra hospital's paediatric high-dependency unit.

"I can find a way of protecting, of giving parents that level of confidence and protect our kids moving forward, I think it's for good," he said. The Canberra Times.

In 2009, Professor Rubens was at the peak of his private obstetrics practice when his son became ill.

The words coming home after a long shift and being kept awake by the 30-month-old's persistent cough. "The just get worse and worse at home over a few days and ultimately, eventually collapsed at home," Professor Rubens said. In the emergency department, Tim was seen by an on-call paediatrician hours



RSV can cause bronchiolitis and pneumonia in infants and young children.



VIRUS WEAPON

New access to a vaccine to protect children from a dangerous virus. www.7NEWS.com.au



## Lucky to be alive

One of the country's leading doctors is calling for a respiratory syncytial virus vaccine to be put on the National Immunisation Schedule, after revealing his own son nearly died from the condition as a toddler.

It comes amid an alarming spike in respiratory illnesses being reported, including COVID, as mask mandates return at ACT health facilities.

REPORTS: PAGES 8-9

Today WINTER RSV WARNING HEALTH EXPERTS BRACE FOR TSUNAMI OF HOSPITALISATIONS

BRISBANE SYDNEY ADEL 17°



Nicole Woolf's 18-month-old twins Raphael and Abigail were admitted to hospital last year. Picture: Ross Swanborough







# Access

Let's protect Australians at greatest risk of severe RSV.



Increasing RSV deaths in older West Australians sparks calls for free vaccination rollout | The West Australian

[Visit >](#)





**ABC** Australian Broadcasting Corpor...

Free RSV vaccines aim to  
reduce infant  
hospitalisations




1 day ago



**I Support RSV Protection**

*because it will dramatically reduce the risk of hundreds of babies being admitted to hospital for chest infections in winter.*



**Our RSV Story**

**When baby Owen was hospitalised for RSV-related pneumonia...**

**“He was called the sickest baby on the ward.”**

**STORIES**

Every year, thousands of Australian families are impacted by RSV-related illness, with memories often lasting a lifetime.

Here's just a small selection of these countless stories.



In a quiet Adelaide suburb, Deborah Smith, a 72-year-old retired nurse, finds herself battling the lingering effects of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) six years after the infection.

As a former nurse, Deborah was no stranger to health challenges. However, nothing could have prepared her for the debilitating impact of severe RSV.

[Read More →](#)



In June 2022, mother-of-three Kellie Damon noticed her 13-month son Owen was unusually quiet and still.

For a baby who was always on the go, Kellie was concerned, especially when she noticed how pale he looked. Something wasn't right.

[Read More →](#)



When Marie Compagnon bought home newborn Elio during the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020, the family did what they could to protect him.

[Read More →](#)



Santanna's second child Rebel was only four weeks old when she caught RSV from her two-year-old brother in July 2023.

By day three of cold-like symptoms, baby Rebel took a turn for the worse and was rushed to Monash Children's Hospital.

[Read More →](#)

NEWS 9



**Virus killer baby joy**

Free RSV vaccinations hailed huge success by doctors

**REBECCA PARISH**

Fewer babies were admitted to hospital with RSV this year due to the success of free vaccinations in WA.

Hospital admissions were almost 84 per cent down on anticipated numbers as a result. More than 23,000 children were vaccinated between April and September, with free jabs offered to newborns, infants up to eight months and vulnerable toddlers.

"In previous years, we would see young child after young child with RSV admitted to hospital in the middle of the winter season," Perth Children's Hospital clinician Chris Blyth said. "It would significantly impact our emergency department with baby after baby coming in with this significant illness."

"We saw significantly less of that this year... Our RSV and our flu season coincided this year, so if we hadn't got this program it would have meant managing the hospital would have been incredibly hard."

Professor Blyth, who was also key investigator for a study of the program's effectiveness, said about 1000 RSV-related hospital admissions were recorded in children aged under two in WA each year.

Infants under six months were most at risk from the potentially deadly virus.

Mum Sheny Jones said discussions about vaccinating her baby started when she was 36 weeks pregnant. It was a "no-brainer" for her after seeing other children become very unwell from the condition.

Her third child, four-month-old daughter Lilah, was vaccinated a few hours after birth and Ms Jones said she was a "very healthy" baby.

"It was definitely important to me to protect her as much as I could," Ms Jones said.

"I think it's amazing we live in a country (with) these options to immunise our babies and protect them, especially from something nasty like RSV where they can end up in hospital, quite unwell."

Perth-based Immunisation Foundation of Australia founder and director Catherine Hughes said the results would hopefully ensure the program was repeated in future years and that "all babies, in all post-codes" were protected.

"These results show the remarkable difference RSV protection has made, not only to the lives of families but also to the immense burden faced by our health services every winter," she said.

"By slashing the annual number of RSV hospitalisations by 60 per cent, this program has alleviated the pressure on hospitals during peak respiratory season, freeing up beds and easing workload pressures."

WA's free RSV vaccines program was the first in the southern hemisphere.

# Acceptance

**Let's embrace the evidence for RSV protection.**

Sponsored



**Free RSV protection for babies**

[Learn more](#)

[ifa.org.au](https://ifa.org.au) Free RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) immunisation is now available for West Australia... more



Fact Sheet: RSV Vaccination for Older Australians

Fact Sheet: RSV in Older Adults

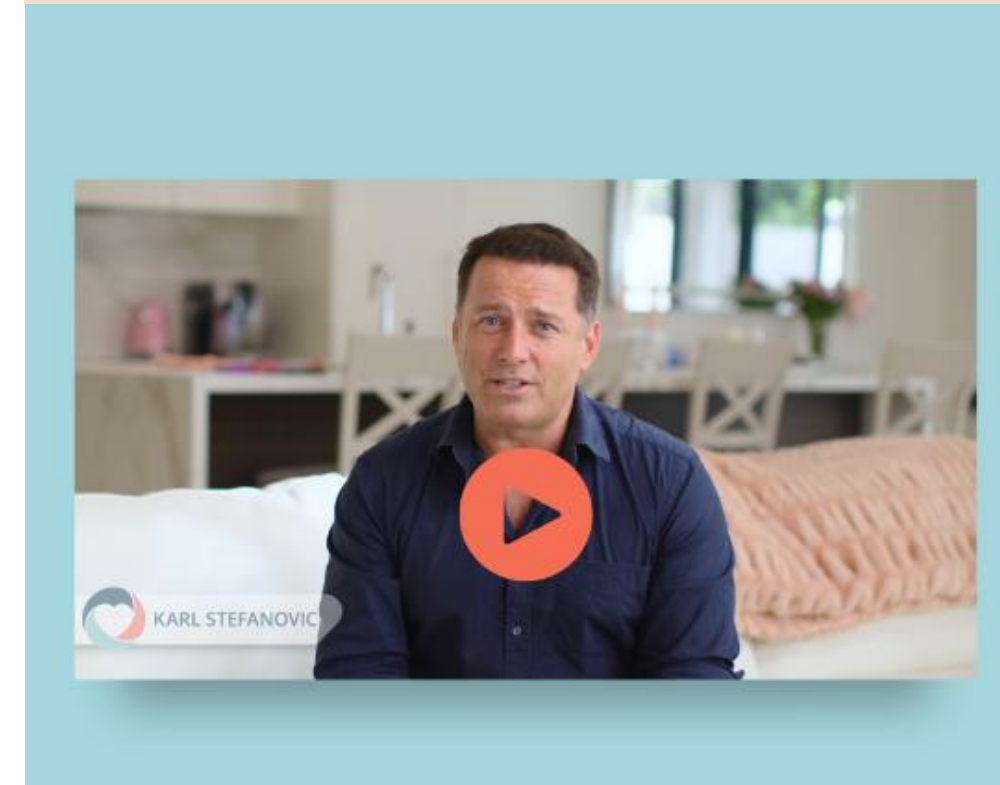
Fact Sheet: Antibody Therapy (sevimab) for Infants

**I support RSV protection**

because my baby's counting on me

out of hospital

at high risk of pneumonia



**KARL STEFANOVIC**



# What's next for Unite Against RSV?



## Awareness

- RSV Awareness Week 2025



## Access

- Monoclonal antibodies on NIP\*
- RSV vaccines for older Australians



## Acceptance

- Collaboration in RSV research programs
- Dissemination of RSV immunisation research into community
- RSV immunisation ambassadors

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**RSV Awareness Week**

**June 1 - June 7, 2025**

[www.ifa.org.au/UniteAgainstRSV](http://www.ifa.org.au/UniteAgainstRSV)



Save  
the  
Date

