

Briefing for pharmacy teams – the RSV and Pertussis Vaccination Service

This Community Pharmacy England Briefing provides information for pharmacy teams on the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccination and Pertussis vaccination programmes which is commissioned as a National Enhanced service from selected pharmacies from May 2025.

Introduction

In September 2024, NHS England commissioned an RSV immunisation programme, with the initial offer covering a one-off catch-up campaign for older adults aged 75-79 years on 1st September 2024, as well as a routine on-going programme for those turning 75 years old and a pregnancy vaccination programme to protect infants. This programme is commissioned as an Essential service from general practices for older adults, with the pregnancy programme predominantly being commissioned through NHS Trusts.



As part of the NHS Vaccination Strategy, NHS England announced it would commission a supplementary pharmacy vaccination service to run alongside general practice or NHS Trusts where a local population need had been identified.

Following findings from pharmacy early adopter sites in the East of England, NHS England has commissioned an amended service as a National Enhanced Service (NES) for up to 200 additional community pharmacy sites. This service will include both provision of RSV and pertussis vaccinations.

Under a NES, NHS England commissions an Enhanced service that is nationally specified. This requires NHS England to consult with Community Pharmacy England on matters relating to the service specification and remuneration for the service while also allowing the flexibility for local decisions to commission the service to meet local population needs.

The service aims to maximise access to, and uptake of, RSV vaccinations and pertussis vaccinations and will be provided by an appropriately trained and competent pharmacist or pharmacy technician.

What is RSV and how does it affect people?

RSV is a common cause of coughs and colds, with most infected people only getting cold-like symptoms. While RSV infections usually get better by themselves, they can sometimes be serious for babies and older adults. In babies, RSV is a common cause of a type of chest infection called [bronchiolitis](#). This can cause breathing problems and may need to be treated in hospital. RSV can also cause [pneumonia](#) in babies and older adults.

Pregnant women are encouraged to have the vaccine during every pregnancy. This helps make sure each baby is protected for the first six months after they are born, as this is the period they are most likely to get seriously ill if they get RSV.



Older adults only need one vaccine dose, which should provide them with protection for several years.

What is Pertussis and how does it affect infants?

Pertussis, commonly referred to as Whooping cough, is a bacterial infection of the lungs and breathing tubes. It causes long bouts of coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. The "whoop" sound is caused by gasping for breath after each bout of coughing, though babies do not always make this noise. It spreads very easily, can be serious for babies and may lead to complications resulting in hospitalisation and even death.

While it is part of the routine childhood vaccination programme, the first vaccination does not occur until babies are eight weeks old. Babies who are too young to start their vaccinations are, therefore, at greatest risk.

Pregnant women can help protect their babies by getting vaccinated. After vaccination, the pregnant woman's body produces antibodies to protect against whooping cough, some of which, are then passed to her unborn baby. Pregnant women are encouraged to have the vaccine during every pregnancy.



Pregnant women are usually offered the whooping cough vaccine around the time of their mid-pregnancy scan (usually at 20 weeks pregnant), but they can have it from 16 weeks. The pharmacy service, therefore, provides an opportunity for pharmacy teams to promote uptake amongst pregnant women who have not yet taken up the offer of a vaccine.

Who is eligible for the service?

In line with vaccinations provided by general practices, the commissioned pharmacies will be able to provide RSV vaccination to the following patients:

- Those who are at least 75 years of age and have not yet reached 80 years of age at the date of administration of the vaccination; or
- Those who are 79 years of age on 31st August 2024 who can be vaccinated up until 31st August 2025; and
- Those who are pregnant and from 28 weeks of pregnancy until delivery.



As part of the service, commissioned pharmacies will also be able to provide a pertussis vaccination to further assist with optimising vaccine uptake in pregnant women. This will be offered to those who are pregnant and from 16 weeks of pregnancy until delivery.



What role can I play in the service?

The whole pharmacy team can be involved in promoting this service and can recruit eligible people to the service. Where not providing the service as part of a walk-in offering, the pharmacy team can also be involved in agreeing the date and time of the person's vaccination appointment.



Further information on the service can be found at cpe.org.uk/RSV and Pertussis Vaccination Service.

If you have any queries or require more information, please contact: services.team@cpe.org.uk