Press release
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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL: 23 November 2026 – Melbourne, Australia

Cricket legend Merv Hughes reveals RSV experience as new research among older Australians highlights a gap in understanding their risk

- While 76% of Australians aged 65 and over recognise that their age is a factor that can increase the risk of becoming seriously unwell from respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), fewer (36%) consider themselves personally at moderate or high risk.[1]
- 43% of Australians aged 65+ living with one or more chronic health conditions associated with an increased risk of becoming seriously unwell with RSV were unable to identify at least one of their own health conditions as a risk factor.[1]
- Today, on his 65th birthday, former Australian Test cricketer, Merv Hughes, shares his personal experience with RSV for the first time, revealing how the illness knocked him around and affected him for weeks.

Known to generations of Australians for his fearless fast bowling, trademark moustache and larger-than-life personality, Merv Hughes is now sharing a different side of his life - his experience of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) – a disease that can hit those aged 65+ for six.

RSV is a common and contagious respiratory virus that can affect people of all ages and infections can occur any time throughout the year.[2,3]

As he celebrates turning 65, Merv is encouraging other older Australians to learn more about RSV and understand their own risk, as he shares how the illness disrupted his daily life and how little he knew about it before becoming unwell.

“I’d just come back from the West Indies and felt very rundown. I assumed it was a combination of jet lag and being back in wintery Melbourne, so I thought I’d start feeling better in a day or two. But I just got worse and worse.

“I felt like someone had thrown me into a tumble dryer. I ached everywhere. I had soreness across my chest, a sore throat and just felt fatigued and weak.”

Unable to continue his usual day-to-day activities, Merv spent approximately four days in bed and experienced knock-on effects with persistent fatigue and weakness for weeks afterwards.

“Before this happened, I hadn’t really heard of RSV. I was probably being a typical bloke – I hadn’t given much thought to something like RSV or what it could mean for me.

“Now that I’ve turned 65, I’m definitely more conscious of my health. This experience made me realise it’s worth having a chat with your doctor about RSV and understanding your own risk before you get crook.”

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Although often mild,[3,4] RSV can cause serious illness in older adults, including complications such as pneumonia and hospitalisation.[3] In rare cases, it can lead to respiratory failure or even be fatal.[3,5,6]

Age is an important risk factor in becoming seriously unwell and requiring hospitalisation from RSV, especially for those that are aged 65 and over. People aged 50 and over, living with chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic heart failure (CHF) or coronary artery disease (CAD), may also be at risk.[3,5,7,8] For people living with these conditions, RSV can also have implications for their existing health, including potentially worsening an existing condition.[9]

According to general practitioner, and Honorary Clinical Associate Professor Ralph Audehm, "As we age, our immune system becomes less effective at fighting infections. This can mean illnesses like RSV can have a more serious impact than people expect."

"For people aged 50 and over who are managing conditions such as diabetes, asthma, COPD or heart disease, understanding RSV risk is also important. These conditions can increase the risk of becoming seriously unwell from RSV. At the same time, developing RSV can potentially make an existing chronic condition worse, lead to additional medical care or have health impacts that continue beyond the acute illness."

"Even if you're feeling well and your health conditions are well managed, it is important to understand your personal risk and have a conversation with your GP."

Against this backdrop, new research commissioned by GSK Australia and conducted by YouGov suggests that while older Australians broadly recognise that RSV can have serious consequences, this understanding does not always translate into recognition of their own personal risk.[1]

The research highlights:

- Nearly nine in ten Australians aged 65+ agree becoming unwell with RSV could affect their ability to carry out or manage their usual everyday activities (89%) or could mean needing additional medical care or hospitalisation (86%).[1]
- Yet only 36% consider themselves personally at moderate or high risk of becoming seriously unwell from RSV.[1] More than half (55%) consider themselves at low or no risk or have never considered their personal risk.[1]
- While age was the most widely recognised risk factor, with 76% identifying being aged 65+ as a factor that could increase the risk of becoming seriously unwell from RSV, recognition of certain chronic health conditions was lower.[1]
- Only 34% identified diabetes as a risk factor, while 45% identified CHF or CAD, 54% identified COPD and 61% identified asthma.[1]
- Among Australians aged 65+ living with one or more of these chronic health conditions, 43% were unable to identify at least one of their own conditions as a factor that could increase their risk of becoming seriously unwell from RSV.[1]

According to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, over 63,000 adult RSV notifications have been reported nationally in 2026 as of 17 November.[10] Of the notifications, over 2 in 5 (42%) were among Australians aged 65 years and over.[10]

Symptoms of RSV can be difficult to distinguish from other respiratory infections and may include cough, tiredness, shortness of breath, wheezing, runny nose, congestion and headache.[3]

Sebastian DiNatale, Country Medical Director, GSK Australia, says greater awareness of RSV risk among older Australians, particularly those living with certain chronic health conditions, remains important.

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"Merv's story will likely feel familiar to many older Australians. While awareness of RSV is relatively high, this research suggests Australians aged 65 and over may not always recognise their own risk of becoming seriously unwell from RSV."

"Merv's experience is an important reminder to consider how factors such as your age and existing health may influence your individual risk, and to have that conversation with a healthcare professional."

For more information about RSV, its symptoms and risk factors, speak to your GP or pharmacist or visit RSVwise.com.au. Your healthcare professional can advise you about your individual risk and appropriate management or treatment options.

ENDS

About GSK
GSK is a global biopharma company with a purpose to unite science, technology, and talent to get ahead of disease together. Find out more at Home | GSK AU.

About the Australian research
An online, nationally representative survey of 1,174 Australian adults aged 65 years and over was conducted by YouGov on behalf of GSK Australia between 9 and 15 October 2026, including those with diabetes, asthma, COPD, CHF or CAD to enable analysis of Australians living with these chronic health conditions (n=539). Data was weighted by age group, gender, location, and health condition (with/ without diabetes, asthma, COPD, CHF or CAD) to be representative of Australians aged 65+.[1]

The research explored awareness of RSV, understanding of factors associated with an increased risk of serious illness, perceptions of personal risk, the potential impact of underlying health conditions and conversations with healthcare professionals.

About RSV
Although often mild,[3,4] RSV can cause serious illness and in rare cases, even death, in older adults.[3,6] Symptoms of RSV can include cough, headaches, tiredness, shortness of breath and wheezing, runny nose and congestion.[3,5,6] RSV can spread through coughs and sneezes from infected people, direct contact with infected people, or by touching the face after contact with a contaminated surface.[11] Older adults with certain chronic medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and congestive heart failure have a greater risk of being hospitalised from RSV compared with those without these conditions.[12,13,14]

The RSV disease awareness campaign is sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline Australia Pty Ltd (GSK).

Merv Hughes' story contained within this media release is not representative of all adults' experiences with RSV.

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