



Older Australians recognise RSV can be serious, but many don't consider it a personal risk, new research suggests

- While 90% of Australians aged 65 years and over who were aware of RSV considered it a serious condition, fewer than 2 in 5 were very or extremely concerned about getting sick from RSV themselves¹
- Of those aware of RSV, understanding of the virus remained incomplete. While most older Australians could identify at least one fact about RSV, only 5% were able to correctly identify all seven true statements about the virus¹
- Georgie Parker joins national campaign encouraging Australians to recognise their RSV risk and better understand how the disease can disrupt everyday life

New research commissioned by GSK Australia suggests many Australians aged 65 years and over do not recognise how seriously RSV could potentially impact them despite considering it a serious condition.¹

Although often mild,^{2,3} RSV can be serious in older adults and may lead to complications such as pneumonia and hospitalisation.² In rare cases, it can lead to respiratory failure or even be fatal.^{2,4,5}

GSK Australia surveyed a nationally representative sample of Australians aged 65 years and over. Among those who reported that they had awareness of RSV:

- 90% considered RSV a serious condition, however fewer than 2 in 5 (38%) were very or extremely concerned about getting sick from RSV themselves.¹
- Understanding of the virus was incomplete. While the majority of respondents (82%) could correctly identify at least one fact about RSV, only 5% correctly identified all seven true statements about the virus, highlighting ongoing knowledge gaps.¹

The findings indicate a clear disconnect in older Australians recognising RSV as a serious condition and perceiving it as a personal health risk.¹

Australian actor and advocate for healthy ageing Georgie Parker is encouraging Australians to better understand how RSV risk can change with age and why understanding personal health risks is an important part of staying healthy and active as we get older.

"Like many Australians, I'd heard of RSV, but I didn't really understand how serious it could be or what it might mean for adults as we get older," said Georgie Parker. "I assumed it was something that mainly affected people from an older generation than mine or those who were already quite vulnerable. What I didn't realise was that as we age, natural changes in our immune system can make it harder for our bodies to respond to infections like RSV."

"As someone who has recently entered my 60s, that felt particularly relevant to me."

"Having experienced a serious respiratory illness, I know how quickly it can disrupt your routine, affect your energy levels and take you away from the things that matter most. It made me realise how easy it is to take good health for granted until something unexpected knocks you off course."

"I lead a busy life, and I want to stay healthy and active, both personally and professionally. For me, learning more about RSV has been part of a broader journey of understanding my health as I age, knowing my personal risks and having conversations with my GP so I can make informed decisions about my health in the future."

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The new findings come as RSV continues to circulate across Australia. While cases typically peak during autumn and winter, RSV can occur throughout the year. According to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, as of July 2026 more than 71,500 RSV notifications have been reported this year, with adults aged 65 years and over accounting for 19% of cases.⁶

Infectious diseases physician and Professor of Medicine Paul Griffin, The University of Queensland School of Medicine, says recognition of personal risk is vital in supporting older Australians to age well and maintain a healthy and active later life.

"What is particularly interesting about these findings is that many Australians aged 65 years and over recognise RSV can be serious, but don't necessarily perceive themselves to be personally at risk," said Professor Griffin.

"We often see people acknowledge a health risk in theory while assuming serious illness is more likely to affect somebody else."

"RSV can affect people of all ages, however the risk of serious illness increases for some groups, including infants, older adults and some adults living with underlying health conditions. As we age, our immune systems naturally become less effective at responding to infections and risk tends to increase gradually over time. This doesn't mean people should be alarmed, but it does highlight the importance of understanding your personal risk, knowing what you can do to help protect yourself and seeking information from trusted healthcare professionals especially as you get older."

RSV is a common and contagious respiratory virus,^{2,7} and symptoms can be difficult to distinguish from other respiratory illnesses which may include nasal congestion, cough, tiredness, sore throat, runny nose, body aches and headache.^{2,7}

The survey found that nearly 9 in 10 older Australians either self-manage respiratory symptoms (39%) or delay seeking medical advice when experiencing symptoms (49%), while over 3 in 4 (76%) said symptoms did not feel serious enough or believed they would resolve on their own to warrant speaking to a GP or healthcare professional.¹ Given that immune function naturally declines with age⁸, older Australians may be at increased risk of more serious outcomes from respiratory infections. While RSV can often be managed with rest and drinking plenty of fluids, these findings reinforce the importance of understanding personal risk, recognising when symptoms may be worsening, and seeking appropriate medical advice when needed.

To help reduce the spread of RSV and other respiratory viruses, Australians experiencing respiratory symptoms should consider washing their hands regularly with soap and water, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces and staying home when unwell.

Sebastian DiNatale, Country Medical Director, GSK Australia, says improving understanding of RSV amongst older Australians remains an important focus as RSV continues circulating across Australia.

"At GSK, we want older Australians to feel informed and empowered when it comes to understanding RSV and their personal risk," said Dr DiNatale.

"By encouraging Australians to become more RSV wise and have conversations with their healthcare professional, we hope to support informed decision-making and help people feel more confident about taking a proactive approach to their respiratory health."

For more information about RSV, speak to a GP or a pharmacist, or visit [RSVwise.com.au](https://www.rsvwise.com.au).

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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 data

An online, nationally representative survey of 1,036 Australian adults aged 65 and over, was conducted between 11 and 14 May 2026 by YouGov, on behalf of GSK Australia. Data was collated from eight questions covering RSV awareness, understanding and perceptions of personal risk with all participants agreeing to participate in full transparency on both the source of the survey commissioning, and to the use of their anonymised data. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Australian adults aged 65+.

Respondents who indicated they were aware of RSV (82%, n=855) were asked a series of additional questions relating to their understanding of the virus and perceptions of personal risk. Understanding of RSV was assessed by asking respondents to identify which of seven statements about RSV were true, including statements relating to symptoms, complications and populations at greater risk of severe illness.

About RSV

Although often mild,^{2,3} RSV can cause serious illness and in rare cases, even death, in older adults.^{2,4} Symptoms of RSV can include cough, headaches, tiredness, shortness of breath and wheezing, runny nose and congestion.^{2,4,5} 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.⁷ 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.^{9,10,11}

Media enquiries

Tina Kandelaki

tina@palin.com.au

(Sydney, Australia)

0410 162 251

Angela Hill

angela.m.hill@gsk.com

(Melbourne, Australia)

0466 514 894

Registered Office:

4/436 Johnston Street
Abbotsford
VIC 3067

References

¹ YouGov RSV Consumer Survey May 2026. GSK Data-on-file 2026 [REF-328249]

² Kaler J et al. *Cureus* 2023;15(3):e36342.

³ Korsten K et al. *Eur Respir J* 2021;57(4):2002688.

⁴ Tseng HF et al. *J Infect Dis* 2020;222(8):1298–1310.

⁵ Kodama F et al. *Infect Dis Clin North Am* 2017;31:767–90.

⁶ National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System. <https://nindss.health.gov.au/pbi-dashboard/>

⁷ Australian Centre for Disease Control. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Canberra: Australian CDC; Available from <https://www.cdc.gov.au/diseases/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv>

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⁸ Alfano F et al. *Drugs Aging* 2024;41(6):487–505.

⁹ Branche AR et al. *Clin Infect Dis* 2022;74(6):1004–11.

¹⁰ Prasad N et al. *Clin Infect Dis* 2021;73(1):e158–63.

¹¹ Kujawski SA et al. *PLoS One* 2022;17(3):e0264890.