

For Immediate Release

Hong Kong Society for Microbiology and Infection and Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association Ltd. Highlights the Importance of RSV Vaccination Awareness

Hong Kong, 31 March 2025 – In an effort to tackle the growing health implications of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), the Hong Kong Society for Microbiology and Infection, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association, hosted a press conference addressing the significance of RSV vaccination. Experts from various medical disciplines gathered to emphasize the critical role of awareness and acceptance in combating RSV and its related health risks.

RSV is a common virus that poses severe health risks to vulnerable groups, including infants, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems. Local data show that the annual cumulative hospitalization rates associated with RSV among children under five years old range from approximately 900 to 1,300 per 100,000 population. This age group accounts for the majority of RSV-related hospitalizations, making up 69% of the total. For elderly individuals aged 75 and above, the hospitalization rates range from about 60 to 160 per 100,000 population¹. “RSV poses a significant health risk, leading to severe respiratory illness, particularly in infants, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. Vaccination is crucial for protecting at-risk populations,” said **Dr. Christopher Koon-chi Lai, President of the Hong Kong Society for Microbiology and Infection**.

A recent study on the acceptance of RSV vaccines conducted by a local university revealed that of 2,099 Hong Kong people, 64.6% expressed a willingness to receive the fully funded RSV vaccine, and 50.9% demonstrated a high level of knowledge about RSV². Factors associated with a higher likelihood of vaccine willingness included higher perceived susceptibility, higher perceived benefit, higher cues to action, higher self-efficacy, and lower perceived barriers³. Among those not willing to receive the vaccine,

¹ Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health. (2025). RSV disease and Interim Consensus on the use of RSV vaccines in Hong Kong. *Communicable Diseases Watch*, 21, 1 (Dec 22 2024-Jan 25 2025). Retrieved from https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/cdw_v21_1.pdf

² Zhong, C.C., Keung, V.M.W., Chen, Y.X., Yang, Z.H., Lo, A., Cheung, C., ...& Wong, M.C.S. (2024, December 06). Public Knowledge and Attitudes Toward Respiratory Syncytial Virus Vaccination in Hong Kong: A Territory-Wide Population-Based Study (Preprint). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5194258> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5194258>

³ According to the Health Belief Model.

few of them perceived themselves susceptible to the infection (35.1%), perceived the disease as serious (32.6%), perceived vaccine as beneficial (30.6%), and perceived high cues to action (25.7%). A high proportion perceived barriers to receiving vaccine (60.3%)².

Dr. Martin Chi-sang Wong, Specialist in Family Medicine and Honorary Advisor of the Hong Kong Health Education and Health Promotion Foundation emphasized, “These findings highlight the need for public health efforts to raise awareness and clarify misconceptions about RSV, especially since there are no specific antiviral treatments and vaccination is crucial for prevention.”

Currently, two vaccines are available in Hong Kong, both requiring a single dose, with the objective to fight against severe lower respiratory tract diseases caused by RSV. They are indicated for adults aged 60 years and older, with one of the vaccines also approved for use in pregnant women between 32 to 36 weeks of gestation to protect infants during their first six months of life.

The majority (55%) of RSV cases occurred in the <1-year-olds⁴. RSV infection can progress from an upper respiratory tract infection to a serious lower respiratory tract infection. Long-term sequelae associated with RSV lower respiratory tract infection include recurrent lower respiratory tract infection, impairments in lung function, wheezing and asthma. “I have observed local data indicating that a substantial proportion of RSV-related ICU admissions involves infants under 6 months old. Maternal immunization against RSV is an essential step in protecting newborns. Individual pregnant women should decide through informed consent and seek advice from their healthcare providers.” said **Dr. Liona Chiu-ye Poon, Specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecology (Subspecialist in Maternal Fetal Medicine)**. Among hospitalized patients aged 60 or older, RSV caused more severe illness compared to hospitalizations for COVID-19 or influenza. This included the need for oxygen therapy, high-flow nasal cannula or noninvasive ventilation, and admission to the intensive care unit⁵. **Dr. Bosco Hon-ming Ma, Specialist in Geriatric Medicine** emphasized, “RSV exacerbates chronic respiratory conditions and places substantial burdens on elderly populations.”

The Hong Kong Society for Microbiology and Infection and Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association Ltd. call for cross-sectoral partnerships – between healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations – to prioritize awareness campaigns and

⁴ Staadegaard, L., Caini, S., Wangchuk, S., Thapa, B., de Almeida, W. A. F., de Carvalho, F. C., ... & Paget, J. (2021, July). The global epidemiology of RSV in community and hospitalized care: findings from 15 countries. In *Open Forum Infectious Diseases* (Vol. 8, No. 7, p. ofab159). US: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/ofid/ofab159

⁵ Surie, D. (2023). Disease severity of respiratory syncytial virus compared with COVID-19 and influenza among hospitalized adults aged ≥ 60 years—IVY network, 20 US States, February 2022–May 2023. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report [MMWR]*, 72, 1083–1088. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7240a2.

advocacy initiatives for RSV vaccination as a fundamental strategy in reducing severe respiratory illness. “Education and access are paramount to building a holistically healthy society, and we should join forces to highlight the importance of RSV vaccination for at-risk populations,” **Dr. Jane Chun-kwong Chan, Specialist in Respiratory Medicine and President of The Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association** commented.

Scan the QR code or click the URL to download the press release, press photos, and the slide deck presented during the press conference:



<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uapBqqrVCVmgJcDx5xoK6FWrFe3qL1JF?usp=sharing>

Useful links:

- Centre for Health Protection, DH, HKSAR: Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Disease: Interim consensus on the use of respiratory syncytial virus vaccines in Hong Kong (As of 17 January 2025) [[URL](#)]
- Centre for Health Protection, DH, HKSAR: Respiratory syncytial virus infection [[URL](#)]
- The Hong Kong College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: Clinical appraisal on the use of maternal respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine in pregnancy to prevent severe RSV infection in infants (issued on 13 December 2024) [[URL](#)]
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States: Respiratory syncytial virus infection [[URL](#)]

Disclaimer: The public survey is supported by educational grant from Pfizer. The company has no influence on the design, operation, or result of the survey findings.