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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Rising cases in Southeast could be start of U.S. RSV season, CDC warns



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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned doctors on Tuesday that a recent increase in cases of respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, in the Southeastern United States could mean additional cases throughout the country in the next two to three months.

The CDC also urged medical professionals to prepare to use the new prevention options approved this year for RSV, which is the leading cause of hospitalization among U.S. infants. Monoclonal antibody products can better protect infants and some young children at higher risk for severe cases of the disease, the agency said, while two new vaccines for the virus are available for adults ages 60 or older.

Infants, young children and older adults, especially those with medical conditions, are at increased risk of severe disease from RSV infection. Each year, the virus causes up to 80,000 hospitalizations and 300 deaths in children under age 5, and 160,000 hospitalizations and 10,000 deaths for adults age 65 and older, the agency estimates.

The increase in cases was observed in PCR tests in Florida starting in the week ending July 22, the agency said. In Georgia, it observed a rise in RSV-associated hospitalizations among children and infants.

“Historically, such regional increases have predicted the beginning of RSV season nationally, with increased RSV activity spreading north and west over the following 2-3 months,” the CDC said.

RSV season usually starts in the fall and peaks in winter, the agency said, but coronavirus prevention measures during the pandemic disrupted this pattern. Last year, RSV activity began in the summer, peaked in October and November and declined by winter, it said.

The virus is primarily spread via respiratory droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, or through direct contact with a contaminated surface, according to the agency.

For those 60 or older, the CDC said doctors should offer a single dose of either of the two RSV vaccines approved this year: Pfizer’s Abrysvo and GSK’s Arexvy. The CDC is recommending those in that age group to talk to their doctor about the benefits and risks of getting vaccinated

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF GETTING VACCINATED.

The Food and Drug Administration last month approved Abrysvo for use in pregnant individuals to protect infants from severe cases of RSV.

Nirsevimab, or Beyfortus, a monoclonal antibody designed to protect infants against RSV, was approved in July. The CDC recommended Tuesday that all infants under 8 months “born during or entering their first RSV season” should receive a single dose of the treatment, while infants and children ages 8 months to 19 months who are at increased risk for severe RSV disease should get one dose before or during their second season.

The shot is expected to become available in early October, the CDC said, adding that it “may not be readily available in all birthing hospitals or primary care settings this RSV season.”