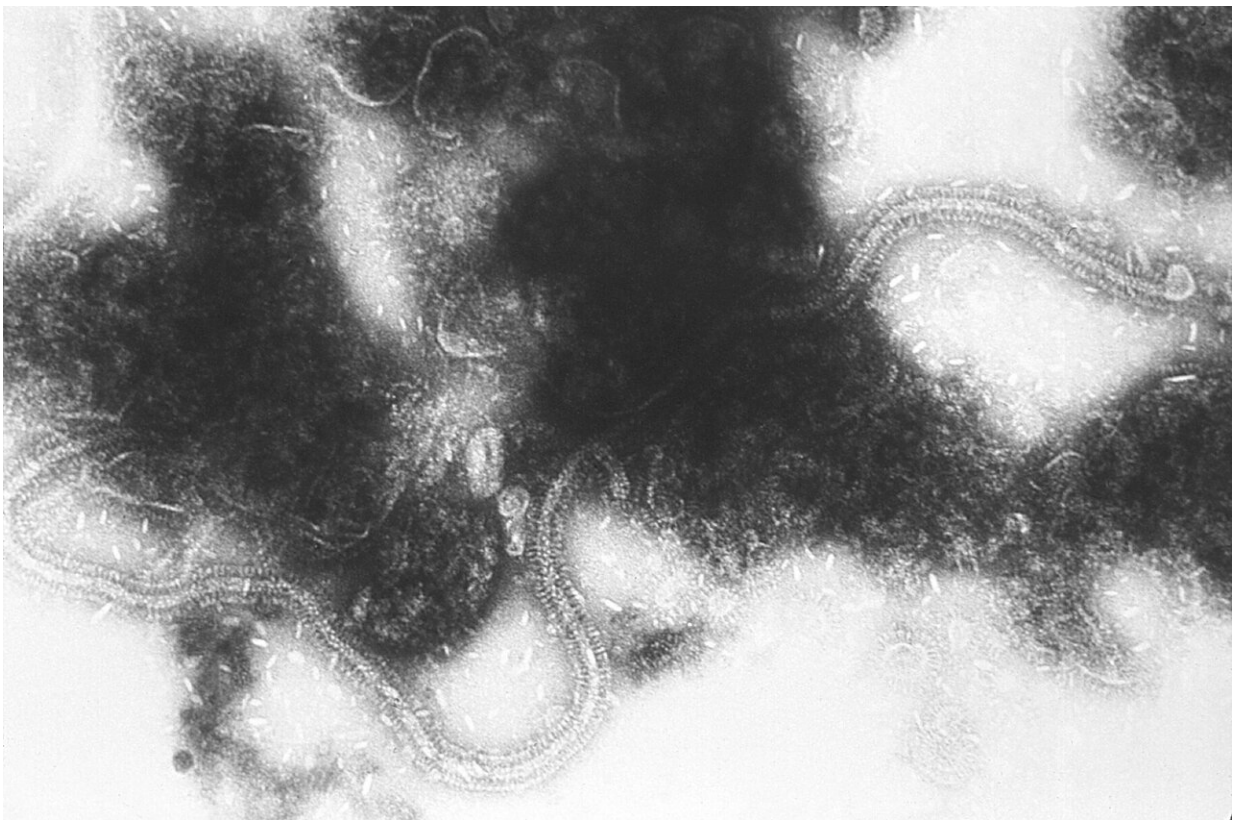


Only nine percent of older Americans were vaccinated against RSV before the disease hit this fall and winter

March 2 2024, by Ann Kellett



Transmission electron micrograph of RSV. Credit: CDC/ Dr. Erskine Palmer / Public Domain

A [new study](#) from the Texas A&M University School of Public Health

found that only 9 percent of older Americans had been vaccinated against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) prior to this fall and winter, despite the threat of increased rates of hospitalization and deaths nationwide from the virus.

"RSV—along with COVID-19 and influenza—form the current 'triple-demic' found across the United States this fall and winter," said Simon Haeder, Ph.D., the study's author. "While the elderly, as well as the very young and those with [chronic health conditions](#), typically are affected more than others, the good news is that vaccines now are available for all three of these respiratory viruses."

The study, one of the first to address [seniors](#) and RSV, was published in *Health Affairs Scholar*. It asked 1,345 Americans over the age of 60 about their current [RSV vaccination](#) status and their intention to get the vaccine. Although RSV usually causes [mild, cold-like symptoms](#) that last a week or two, it can also lead to serious illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 60,000 to 160,000 seniors in the United States [are hospitalized with RSV](#) each year, and 6,000 to 10,000 ultimately die from the infection.

The study found that men were more likely to be vaccinated against RSV than women, and that those who were vaccinated had higher levels of concern about the disease, believed they were at greater risk for getting the disease, believed that vaccines were safe and important, and had higher levels of trust in health institutions.

Of the 91 percent of seniors who were unvaccinated against RSV, 42 percent said they planned to get the vaccination. Respondents who were vaccine hesitant reported that they did not need the vaccine, lacked information about the vaccine and had concerns about its side effects and safety.

"Although the vaccines are 83 percent to 89 percent effective in [preventing lung infections](#), the CDC [did not officially recommend](#) them this year, which may have also been a factor," Haeder said. "In addition, [vaccine hesitancy](#) is growing worldwide in response to COVID-19."

The likely results will be more illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths among the vaccine hesitant, especially among the very young, elderly and those who have chronic health conditions, Haeder said.

Haeder's study is the latest in a series of studies assessing vaccination hesitancy in the United States. Previous studies have looked at parents' intention to seek out vaccinations [against COVID-19, influenza and RSV](#) for their children, as well as [adults' intention to seek out vaccinations against COVID-19](#). Haeder also previously assessed [vaccination hesitancy amongst pet owners](#).

Haeder said [vaccine hesitancy](#) could be addressed through policies that focus on the potential benefits of vaccination and the potential risks of not being vaccinated, along with programs—especially those tailored for women—that debunk misleading claims about RSV and its vaccines.

"Not only will the unvaccinated place a great burden on the health care system, but their illnesses could have been prevented or mitigated by vaccinations," Haeder said. "The costs to society will be large and will affect society as a whole."

More information: Simon F Haeder, US seniors' intention to vaccinate against RSV in fall and winter 2023–2024, *Health Affairs Scholar* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/haschl/qxae003](https://doi.org/10.1093/haschl/qxae003)

Provided by Texas A&M University

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