

Staying Protected This Season: A Message from the RDH Infection Prevention Team

As we move into the colder months, the Rangely District Hospital Infection Prevention Team would like to remind our community about the importance of vaccination in protecting yourself, your loved ones, and our most vulnerable residents. This season, vaccines against Influenza (Flu), COVID-19, RSV, and Pneumococcal Disease are available and recommended for many age groups. Here's what you should know.

Influenza (Flu) Vaccine

Influenza, or "the flu," is a contagious respiratory illness that affects millions of people in the U.S. every year. While many recover after a few days of rest, the flu can lead to serious complications, hospitalizations, and even death—especially among older adults, young children, and those with chronic health conditions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual flu shot for everyone 6 months and older, except in rare cases. While vaccine effectiveness can vary from year to year, studies show that the flu vaccine typically reduces the need for medical visits by 40–60% when vaccine strains closely match circulating viruses. Recent data also show a 29% reduction in hospitalizations and an 18% reduction in deaths among vaccinated individuals.

Flu shots contain either inactivated virus or virus-like particles and cannot cause infection. Common side effects include mild soreness, headache, or fatigue that usually resolve within a few days. Severe allergic reactions are rare. Those with egg allergies can safely receive any recommended flu vaccine, and individuals with severe allergies to a vaccine component should consult their healthcare provider.

COVID-19 Vaccine

The CDC continues to recommend the updated 2024–2025 COVID-19 vaccine for most adults 18 years and older. Parents of children 6 months–17 years should discuss vaccination options with their child's healthcare provider.

Two types of vaccines are available:

- mRNA vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty and Moderna Spikevax
- Protein subunit vaccines (non-mRNA options)

Vaccination is especially important for adults 65 and older, those with underlying health conditions, long-term care residents, and individuals who are pregnant or planning pregnancy.

Typical side effects include injection site pain, fatigue, or mild fever, which generally resolve within a few days. Serious side effects, such as myocarditis (heart inflammation) or thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), are extremely rare. Ongoing monitoring continues to show that COVID-19 vaccines significantly reduce the risk of hospitalization and death.

Recent studies found vaccine effectiveness of 29–40% against hospitalization and up to 79% protection against death or mechanical ventilation—powerful evidence that vaccination remains a vital layer of protection.

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) Vaccine

RSV can cause severe respiratory illness, especially in infants, older adults, and those with chronic health conditions. The CDC now recommends RSV vaccination for:

- All adults 75 years and older
- Adults 50–74 with increased risk for severe illness
- Pregnant women between 32–36 weeks of gestation
- Infants under 8 months old entering their first RSV season

Approved vaccines include:

- Pfizer Abrysvo – for adults and pregnant women
- GSK Arexvy – for adults 50 and older at higher risk
- Moderna mResvia – recently expanded to include adults 18–59 at increased risk

To protect newborns, either maternal vaccination (Abrysvo) or a monoclonal antibody (Beyfortus) may be used. Most infants need only one form of protection.

Reported side effects are mild and short-lived. RSV vaccines have been proven safe and effective, with only rare reports of neurological side effects under review.

Pneumococcal Vaccine

Pneumococcal disease, caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, can lead to ear infections, pneumonia, and even bloodstream infections. It can be especially dangerous for children, older adults, and individuals with chronic illnesses.

The CDC recommends vaccination for:

- All children under 5 years old
- Adults 50 years and older
- Adults 19–49 with certain medical conditions (heart, lung, or liver disease, diabetes, or smoking history)

Two main vaccines are used:

- Conjugate vaccines: PCV13, PCV15, or PCV20
- Polysaccharide vaccine: PPSV23

Common side effects are minor, such as soreness or low-grade fever. Serious reactions are very rare. Pneumococcal vaccines remain one of the most effective tools in preventing severe bacterial infections.

Vaccine Safety and Monitoring

Vaccine safety in the U.S. is closely monitored through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), managed by the CDC and FDA. This system collects reports from healthcare providers and the public to ensure continuous monitoring and safety evaluation.

Your Health, Your Protection

Vaccines are one of the safest and most effective ways to prevent illness and hospitalization. At Rangely District Hospital, our team encourages everyone to review their vaccination status, talk with their healthcare provider, and make informed decisions based on their age, health conditions, and lifestyle.

By staying up to date on your vaccines, you're not only protecting yourself—you're protecting our community.

—The RDH Infection Prevention Team