RSV: ON THE VERGE OF CHANGE

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Syndicated Global RSV Study, Ipsos
November 2022

After decades of failed attempts, the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) treatment and vaccine landscape is on the verge of profound change. Several pharmaceutical companies have an RSV vaccine or preventative treatment in late-stage clinical trials – demonstrating highly promising results – and are racing to become the first to market.

BACKGROUND

RSV is a seasonal virus, like the flu, and infects almost everyone by the age of two[1]. During the winter season, it can place a considerable burden on clinics and hospitals. One source considers the virus responsible for more than 60% of acute respiratory infections in children worldwide, along with an annual 60,000 hospitalizations of children under five and 200,000 hospitalizations of the elderly, in the United States alone[2].

Although RSV can impact all ages, it has the potential to cause a serious sequela of illnesses amongst vulnerable populations, particularly infants, the elderly and those with chronic conditions or weakened immune systems.

Currently, RSV treatment is typically limited to supportive care; the key exception to this is palivizumab, a costly prophylactic antibody treatment to prevent lower respiratory tract disease caused by RSV in high-risk preterm infants[3,4].

A BURGEONING PIPELINE

There is, however, hope on the horizon with several pharmaceutical companies actively developing promising RSV vaccines and treatments. GSK, Janssen, Moderna and Pfizer are spearheading vaccines that can be given to older adults, with Bavarian Nordic and Novavax also developing older adult vaccines in earlier trial stages. Pfizer is championing a vaccine for pregnant individuals to protect their newborns from RSV; Novavax is similarly trialing a maternal vaccine. In addition, Moderna and Novavax are trialing pediatric vaccinations for age groups 1 to <5 years and 2 to 6 years, respectively. The recent IDWeek 2022 congress, which took place 19-23 October, provided a forum for clinical data updates to be presented, showcasing the momentum in this area. In particular, GSK announced Phase III results indicating overall vaccine efficacy of 82.6% among adults aged 60+. In terms of treatments, AstraZeneca and Sanofi's nirsevimab, and Merck's clesrovimab, are examples of antibody-based drugs that could be given directly to newborns to prevent RSV disease. Another treatment in development is Pfizer's sisunatovir, an orally administered inhibitor that can be given to both adults and infants.

THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE

With the COVID-19 pandemic leading to increased vaccine awareness globally, and several of these developmental candidates reporting very favorable efficacy data, we predict that an RSV vaccine has the potential to shake up current treatment approaches and vastly reduce hospitalization rates. Moreover, June/July 2022 data from Ipsos' Global Vaccines Study showed that 25% of participating healthcare professionals are reporting a seasonal increase in RSV cases, with higher proportions of southern hemisphere participants citing case increases (i.e., Brazil, 40%; Colombia, 43%; Argentina, 50%; Australia, 66%), compared to their northern hemisphere counterparts (see '*About the Research*' for further details).

That being said, the consumer element of a later wave of the same study in September revealed that only 27% of people aged 18-74 in 19 countries are actually familiar with RSV. (26% of those who are familiar with RSV believe they are at high risk of infection.)

This highlights a very real need for increased awareness of this virus and its implications, to aid successful vaccination programs. If this is achieved, and combined with the advent of vaccines and new treatments, how will dynamics shift? Will consumers proactively initiate discussions with healthcare professionals around RSV vaccines, for themselves or their child? Will healthcare professionals include discussions centered around a preventative RSV vaccine during routine consults?

Ipsos is at the forefront of understanding RSV treatment and prevention, with the launch of our new Global Syndicated RSV Study. We uncover evolving attitudes and perceptions around RSV vaccines, from the perspectives of healthcare professionals, pediatricians, pharmacists and consumers.

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Ipsos' Global Vaccines Study is a survey conducted among healthcare professionals (including pediatricians), pharmacists and consumers. The healthcare professional element of the study was conducted online in South Africa, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, USA, Japan, Australia, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Saudia Arabia, Philippines, Switzerland. Results cited in this article were collated across June 16 – July 19, 2022. The sample for this study consists of 982 HCPs across the 17 regions mentioned. The consumer element of the study was conducted on the Ipsos Global Advisor online platform among adults aged 16-74 in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, Turkey, Poland, Austria, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, and South Africa and adults 18-74 in the US. Results cited in this article were collated during September 8 – 14 2022. The sample for this study consists of approximately 22,512 consumers across the 19 regions mentioned.

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