

National Minority Quality Forum Urges Policymakers to Ensure Equitable Access to New Respiratory Syncytial Virus Immunizations

Health Equity Action Report Shows Low-income children of color are at high risk of severe RSV

Washington, D.C. (July 24, 2023) — [National Minority Quality Forum](#) released a report that recommends policymakers and key health stakeholders to take action to increase health equity in the prevention of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) ahead of an Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting scheduled on August 3rd to review The [RSV Health Equity Action report](#) raises awareness about current inequities in RSV prevention and care, particularly among low-income children in minoritized populations and the need to ensure that all infants have equitable access to technologies such as monoclonal antibodies that prevent RSV in the Vaccines for Children program.

RSV, responsible for more than 58,000 yearly hospitalizations and up to 100 to 300 deaths in children under 5 years, is the leading cause of hospitalization in infants yet lacks federally approved immunization. RSV poses a significant threat to vulnerable populations, particularly infants and young children with compromised immune systems. It is a highly contagious respiratory virus that can result in severe illness, hospitalizations, and in some cases, even death.

“RSV is a growing concern for families of young children across the country and like so many other diseases and illnesses, it disproportionately affects minoritized communities,” said **Dr. Gary Puckrein, President and CEO of National Minority Quality Forum**. “The impact of RSV on affected individuals and their families is not only physical but also emotional and financial, necessitating immediate action to improve access to care and prevent the spread of this preventable disease. We feel very strongly that our policymakers should ensure that any future immunizations should be available for free to all families to help reduce disparities.”

Newborns and young infants are ineligible for traditional vaccines as their immune systems are not yet fully developed. Therefore, increased awareness of and access to new preventative immunizations such as monoclonal antibodies, is essential to reducing the risk of infection and the related consequences. Infants that are especially vulnerable to severe hospitalization related to RSV are Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native children. The disparities are a culmination of inadequate health insurance coverage, access to primary care, and lack of culturally competent care.

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program helps provide vaccines to children whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them. This helps ensure that all children have a better chance of getting their recommended vaccinations on schedule.

The RSV Health Equity Action Report highlights that:

- American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) people and Hispanic people are the most likely to be hospitalized due to RSV.

- Hispanic and Black children carry the burden of infectious respiratory disease occurrence and this is also mitigated by higher rates of poverty and chronic conditions.
- The burden of RSV is higher in children of families in low socioeconomic status areas, leading to higher rates of hospitalizations.
- Infants enrolled in Medicaid have relative risk for RSV hospitalizations of 2.03 (1.99-2.06) compared to non-Medicaid payers.

Key Recommendations included in the report:

- Strengthening national and regional surveillance systems for RSV can improve reporting accuracy and consistency. Standardizing reporting criteria, expanding routine testing, and promoting awareness among healthcare providers about the importance of reporting RSV cases are vital steps.
- Educating healthcare providers, particularly those in primary care settings, about the clinical presentation, diagnosis, and reporting requirements for RSV can help increase case identification and reporting.
- Educate families on new preventative immunization options when available.
- Launching culturally competent public health campaigns to educate families about RSV symptoms, the importance of seeking medical attention, and reporting cases can help capture a more accurate representation of the disease burden.
- Encouraging collaborative efforts between researchers, public health agencies, and healthcare providers can facilitate comprehensive studies on RSV, including its prevalence, impact, and prevention strategies.
- Ensuring equitable access to new long-acting mAbs for RSV immunization by including them in the Vaccines for Children Program

Read the full report on [RSVEquityAction.Org](https://www.nmqf.org/RSVEquityAction.Org). The website will include important educational information regarding RSV prevention and downloadable advocacy materials including infographics, fact sheets and social graphics. Additionally, website visitors will be able to view NMQF's [letter](#) to ACIP sharing support for RSV immunization and sign on to support the program.

The report and website are made possible with the support from Sanofi.

About National Minority Quality Forum

The National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit research and advocacy organization based in Washington, DC. The mission of NMQF is to reduce patient risk by assuring optimal care for all. NMQF's vision is an American health services research, delivery and financing system whose operating principle is to reduce patient risk for amenable morbidity and mortality while improving quality of life. For more information, please visit www.nmqf.org.