



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Oxford Newborn Care Unit

Palivizumab (Synagis®) for RSV Infection

Information for parents and carers



Why have we been given this information?

Your baby has been identified as being likely to benefit from receiving a course of monthly palivizumab injections. This medication can help reduce the risk of them developing a serious infection caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

What is RSV?

RSV is an extremely common winter virus, which occurs mostly between October and February. It usually causes mild cold-like symptoms in adults and children. However, in young infants it causes a chest infection called bronchiolitis; this is common in babies under the age of two. This is often a mild infection, but it can make some higher risk premature infants with heart or lung problems very unwell.

Palivizumab has been shown to help prevent serious infection from RSV in these infants.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread in a similar way to the common cold. It can be passed on by sneezing, touching someone with the infection, or touching something which has the virus on it. RSV can survive for between 4-7 hours on surfaces.

You can help stop the spread of infection by:

- regularly washing your hands and your children's hands
- keeping your baby away from crèche or nursery, where other children may be infected with RSV
- keeping people with colds away from your baby during the winter months
- disposing of used tissues and other handkerchiefs immediately after use
- cleaning and disinfecting baby toys
- not allowing smoking around your baby.

What is Synagis?

Synagis is an immunisation which contains palivizumab, which is the virus fighting antibody that helps protect high risk infants against bronchiolitis.

How does palivizumab work?

The antibodies in the palivizumab provide **passive** immunisation against the RSV. This means the antibodies are able to help protect your baby from serious infection.

The level of these antibodies gradually falls after each injection, so the injections have to be repeated each month to make sure your baby continues to be protected.

It is not a true vaccine (**active immunisation**), as it does not stimulate your baby's body to produce its own antibodies when they come into contact with that virus in the future.

How is it given?

Synagis is given as an intramuscular injection into the muscle of the thigh.

Your baby will have an injection of palivizumab once a month between October and February, up to a maximum of 5 injections. It is important to come for all the appointments, to make sure their level of protection remains high enough over the winter season.

The injections are given by the neonatal unit staff in the hospital outpatient department. This medicine is not available at your GP's surgery.

If your baby is on the Neonatal Unit and is ready to leave between October and February, they will have their first dose of Synagis whilst they're still in the hospital. You will then be given outpatient appointments for the other injections.

Can it be given at the same time as other immunisations?

Yes, although a different area of their body would be used if they were also injections.

Are there any reasons why my baby should not have the injections?

There are very few babies who cannot have this medicine. Reasons would include previous serious allergic reactions to palivizumab and if they have serious blood clotting problems.

If you have concerns, please discuss these with either your baby's hospital doctor, your GP or with the specialist neonatal nurse.

Minor illnesses are not a reason for your baby not to have the injection. If your baby has a raised temperature, or seems more than a little unwell, you should discuss this with the specialist neonatal nurse to see if the injection should be carried out at another time.

Are there any side effects or complications from the injections?

The most common reactions are redness or swelling where the injection has been given, high temperature, diarrhoea and being more unsettled. These symptoms are usually quite minor and will settle within 24-48 hours.

Extremely rarely, babies can develop an allergic response to the vaccine. Symptoms of this might include swelling of their face or body, breathing difficulties or rashes anywhere on their body.

Please contact your GP (or 999 in an emergency) if you are concerned that your baby may be developing significant side effects.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to the neonatal specialist nurse or your baby's hospital consultant. Contact numbers can also be found on the appointment letters.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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