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Additional Palivizumab Prophylaxis Doses for the 2021–22 RSV Season

Background

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is an important cause of hospitalization for infants in the United States.¹ Hospitalization rates are higher for premature infants and infants with chronic lung disease or congenital heart disease.¹ Rural Alaska Native children have had 5-fold higher RSV hospitalization rates compared to other US children.²

Palivizumab (Synagis®) is a monoclonal antibody that reduces the risk of RSV hospitalization in certain high-risk children.¹ In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) revised the eligibility criteria for palivizumab prophylaxis to restrict availability to those children at highest risk.^{1,3} The AAP recommends a maximum of 5 palivizumab doses to cover the season, which typically lasts 4–5 months.^{1,3} The AAP *Redbook* recognizes Alaska's unique RSV seasonality and increased RSV hospitalizations among Alaska Native infants and supports Alaska-specific prophylaxis criteria.³

In March 2020, following the institution of social distancing for the prevention of coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19), RSV infections decreased rapidly and dramatically in the United States.^{4,5} In a marked deviation from the typical season, RSV activity remained very low nationally through the traditional 2020–21 RSV season, but began to increase in the spring of 2021.^{4,5} In August, the AAP strongly supported consideration of the early use of palivizumab in regions experiencing elevated rates of interseasonal RSV activity with reassessment at least monthly.⁵

Alaska's 2021 Interseasonal RSV Activity

Laboratory data from hospital laboratories are used to track RSV trends. In Alaska, RSV activity remained low from late March 2020 through summer 2021. In August 2021, RSV hospitalizations began to increase in Alaska, signifying an interseasonal RSV period. On August 25, 2021, the Statewide RSV Workgroup reviewed available RSV laboratory and hospitalization data and recommended administration of interseasonal palivizumab during September 3 through November 30, 2021.⁶

Alaska 2021–22 Medicaid Palivizumab Clinical Criteria

In keeping with the AAP guidance,⁵ the RSV Seasonality Workgroup met a gain in November 22, 2021, and determined that RSV activity remained elevated. Alaska Medicaid authorized the administration of up to 5 doses of palivizumab to select high-risk children during September 3, 2021 through May 15, 2022.^{1,3,7}

Additional Medicaid Criteria for Palivizumab Doses

On December 27, 2021, the AAP supported consideration of more than 5 palivizumab doses in regions with continued RSV transmission during the 2021–22 RSV season.⁸ On February 4, 2022, the RSV Seasonality Workgroup met and evaluated data from four Alaska hospitals and determined that RSV activity remained elevated (Figure).

For children who qualified for 5 doses prior to December 1, 2021, Medicaid will authorize a 6th dose. More than 6 doses will require individual authorization. If RSV activity drops to below threshold levels during this period, the RSV Seasonality Workgroup will advise discontinuation of palivizumab for the season. The clinical eligibility criteria for palivizumab will remain the same as during the 2020–21 season and will continue to reflect the 2009 AAP criteria (Table).⁹

Figure. RSV-Positive Tests at Four Alaska Hospitals During the 2019–20, 2020–2021, and 2021–22 Seasons

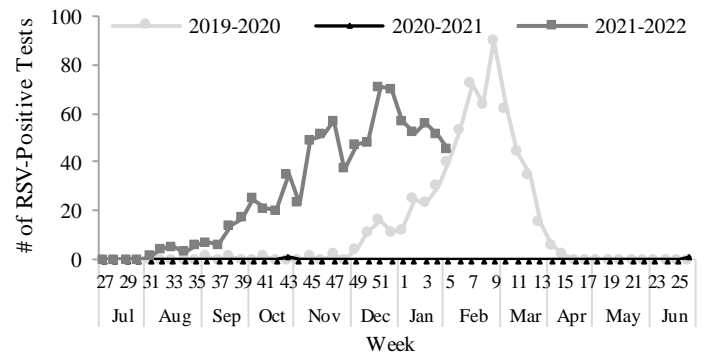


Table. Alaska Medicaid Palivizumab Coverage, 2021–22 Season⁹

Date of Birth	Gestational Age (Wks)	Risk Factors	# of Doses 9/3/21–5/15/22
Born on or after Sept 1, 2021 (<3 months)	32 to <35	At least one: • daycare attendance • sibling aged <5 years • home without running water • ≥3 children per bedroom or ≥7 people per household	≤3, until 90 days of age
Born after May 30, 2021 (<6 months)	29 to <32		≤6
Born after Nov 30, 2020 (<12 months)	<29		≤6
Born after Nov 30, 2020 (<12 months)	Any	• congenital airway anomaly • neuromuscular disease	≤6
Born on or after Nov 30, 2019 with CHD; or born after Nov 30, 2019 with CLD	Any	• congenital heart disease (CHD) • chronic lung disease (CLD)	≤6

References

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3. AAP. Respiratory Syncytial Virus. In: Kimberlin DW, Barnett ED, Lynfield R, Sawyer MH eds. *Red Book*. 32nd Itasca, IL:2021:628–36.
4. Nolen LD, Seeman S, Bruden D, Klejka J, Desnoyers C, Tiesinga J, Singleton R. Impact of social distancing and travel restrictions on non-coronavirus disease 2019 (Non-COVID-19) respiratory hospital admissions in young children in rural Alaska. *Clin Infect Dis* 2021;72(12):2196–98.
5. AAP. Interim Guidance for Use of Palivizumab Prophylaxis to Prevent Hospitalization from Severe Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection During the Current Atypical Interseasonal RSV Spread (updated August 10, 2021.)
6. SOE *Bulletin*. “Palivizumab Prophylaxis Guidance during Interseasonal RSV Activity, September 2021.” No. 12, September 1, 2021. Available at: http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2021_12.pdf
7. SOE *Bulletin*. “Updated Palivizumab Prophylaxis Guidance for the 2021–22 RSV Season.” No. 20, November 24, 2021. Available at: http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2021_20.pdf
8. AAP. Updated Guidance: Use of Palivizumab Prophylaxis to Prevent Hospitalization From Severe Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection During the 2021–2022 RSV Season (aap.org) (updated December 27, 2021)
9. Medicaid 2021–22 Criteria: ALASKA MEDICAID December 2021 - May 2022 Season Synagis® (palivizumab)