

# Ageing with Vitality

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Singapore is a rapidly ageing society. Statistics from the National Population and Talent Division, Strategy Group Prime Minister's Office revealed that the proportion of Singaporeans aged 20-64 years has decreased from 64.8 percent in 2014 to 60.4 percent in 2024. Conversely, the proportion of older adults (aged 65 and above) has increased from 12.4 percent in 2014 to 19.9 percent in 2024. It is estimated that, by 2030, 24.1 percent of Singaporeans will be aged 65 and above.<sup>1</sup>

The risk and impact of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and herpes zoster increases with age; this is associated with declining immune function.<sup>2</sup> The incidence of herpes zoster increases sharply after 50 years old: it is estimated to be between 8.45 for those aged 50-59, and 10.46 for those greater than 60 years of age.<sup>3</sup> Herpes zoster complications include postherpetic neuralgia – which increases with age – stroke, facial paralysis, and keratitis.<sup>4</sup> While herpes zoster is rarely lethal, it can cause significant morbidity and societal cost. In the United States, herpes zoster results in \$2.6 billion in direct medical costs annually.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, RSV is a significant cause of morbidity and mortality amongst the elderly, infants, immunocompromised adults, and adults with chronic cardiopulmonary disease.<sup>5</sup> Globally, RSV causes an estimated 3.6 million RSV-associated hospitalisations and approximately 100,000 RSV-attributable deaths annually in children aged five years and younger worldwide.<sup>6</sup> While the global estimates of RSV disease amongst adults is unknown, in the United States, RSV causes 160,000 hospitalisations and 10,000 deaths annually amongst adults 65 years and above.<sup>7</sup> Both herpes zoster and RSV pose a significant global health burden that is expected to increase as the population ages.

In Singapore, vaccinations against both RSV and herpes zoster are available. Herpes zoster vaccination has been found to be more than 90 percent effective in preventing shingles and postherpetic neuralgia across age groups, with protection lasting at least 7-10 years.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a meta-analysis evaluating the efficacy of RSV vaccination showed that RSV vaccines could reduce the risk of RSV-related lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) by 78.3 percent and RSV-related severe LRTD by 86.5 percent.<sup>9</sup> Since September 2025, the Ministry of Health, Singapore has extended subsidies and MediSave usage for the shingles vaccine, Shingrix, for eligible Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. Individuals aged 60 years and above and immunocompromised adults aged 18-59 years old are eligible for mean-tested subsidies of up to 75 percent.<sup>10</sup> However, there is currently no government subsidy for the RSV vaccine in Singapore.

Both RSV and herpes zoster are vaccine-preventable diseases and vaccination should be encouraged amongst eligible populations to reduce the burden of such diseases, especially given Singapore's ageing population.

This issue will provide an update for family physicians on RSV and herpes zoster.

In Unit 1, Dr Asok Kurup offers a concise overview of the threats of herpes zoster and RSV, and the importance of vaccination.

In Unit 2, Adj A/Prof See Kay Choong elaborates on why primary care providers should advocate for RSV vaccination.

In Unit 3, Dr Goh Tze Chien Kelvin discusses the impact of herpes zoster and role that vaccination can play in preventing the disease.

In this issue, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan has selected 10 current readings on topics related to RSV and herpes zoster. These readings include articles on burden of disease and importance of vaccination.

This issue also includes two original papers and one PRISM article. The first original paper by Drs Luo Yang, Joshua Lee, Adrian Tan, and Ms Jennifer Tan highlights the role and application of point-of-care ultrasound in community and home care settings. The second original paper by Ms Vernice Vee et al is a mixed-methods study looking at the challenges faced by primary care physicians in private practice on the backdrop of Healthier SG. Finally, the PRISM article by Dr Han Weiyao discusses a case of elderly patient with Alzheimer's disease and how family physicians can help transition patients to community care by re-evaluating the diagnosis and managing caregiver concerns.

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