Actress Jennifer Beals - 60+ Get Vaccinated for RSV Transcript

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Show Introduction and Guest Welcome

The following program does not offer personal medical advice. Please consult your doctor before using any treatment or product we cover. Welcome to GoToHealth Media with your host, Jonathan Marks.

We provide a welcoming environment where experts educate you on important health topics, answer your questions, and provide information from which you can benefit in consultation with your doctor.

You can visit and subscribe to the show at gotohealthmedia.com. And now here is Jonathan Marks. Hey everyone, this is Jonathan Marks. Welcome back to another show of GoToHealth Media.

Today we're talking with actress and producer Jennifer Beals. She's a renowned actor and executive producer and was recently sidelined by respiratory synctiovirus, or RSV.

and she's compelled to share her story as a spokesperson for GlaxoSmithKline. RSV is a common, contagious, and potentially serious respiratory virus that affects the lungs and breathing passages.

Anyone can contract RSV. In fact, those at an increased risk include older adults which can lead to hospitalization and death.

Jennifer Beals on Her RSV Experience

If you are 60 years and older or have an underlying disease such as COPD, asthma, or chronic heart failure, you can be at even more risk. With us today is actress and producer Jennifer Beals.

She's an internationally renowned actor who has over 90 credits to her name. including critically acclaimed feature films and television series. She's best known for her roles in Flashdance, The L Word, L Word Generation Q, and the book of Boba Fett.

Joining us also is Dr. Leonard Friedland, a pediatrician and research scientist who is passionate about preventive health. Following a rewarding career in private practice, he's now involved in the development of a variety of vaccines, for RSV, flu, meningitis, COVID-19, and many others at GlaxoSmithKline.

Welcome to the show, Jennifer and Dr. Friedland. How are you today? Great. Thank you so much for having us, Jonathan. Good. Yes, thank you very much. Good.

So, Jennifer, tell us about your experience with RSV, how you contracted it, if you know, and what the symptoms were and how it's affected your life. Well, first of all, I wanted to say thank you to GSK for inviting me to join their RSV awareness campaign by sharing my experience.

You know, if I can help even one person by sharing my experience, it will be certainly worth it. Just to give you a little bit of context about my experience with RSV.

First of all, I wanted to just say, you know, I've always been really proactive about my health. I consider myself an active person. I love being outdoors.

I kind of need to be outdoors. It puts me in this state of joy. I love exercising outside like, you know, I love hiking and open water swimming and kayaking and playing pickleball.

And I also have a very active work life, you know, if I am not on set. Then during the week, I'm usually in daily meetings developing new projects. So when this happened at first, the symptoms were really mild.

It was just like having a little cold. I had a little bit of congestion and a low-grade fever for a day. But out of precaution, I took a COVID-19 test, which came out negative.

So I just went about my daily life as if I had a cold. And then my symptoms started to get worse. it was you know I had trouble sleeping at that point in time because I had increased congestion and this persistent cough and then suddenly all those things that I love to do like hiking and swimming and kayaking all became more difficult because my breathing was compromised and I could not for the life of me figure out what was going on all I knew was that everything was just that much harder to accomplish.

Who Is at Risk for Severe RSV

So finally I went to my doctor and I was shocked when she diagnosed me with RSV because I had always thought RSV was an anomaly among adults. I thought really only young children and infants contracted RSV.

And then I was shocked again when she told me that there was no specific treatment for RSV. And the best thing that I could do would be to rest, which I'm not gonna lie, is challenging for me.

I did my best and the symptoms lingered for two months and I'm completely fine now, but it was a real wake-up call to the potential severity of respiratory illnesses like RSV.

And how long did you have these symptoms before you went to your doctor? Was this a period of just a couple of days or a week, two weeks? I think I really, I probably waited a couple of weeks.

It wasn't, you know, you get so busy, you get really caught up in your life and you have things that you need to do and you say to yourself, oh, I don't have time to do that.

And then it came to a tipping point where I don't have time to be sick. So I need to go to the doctor now. And I'm so glad that I did and got more information.

Good. Well, thank you very much for sharing that story with us. I will come back to you in a minute, but I want to talk to Dr. Friedland and ask him a few questions.

So Dr. Friedland, we're learning now that anybody can get RSV, right? And I guess the question is, who's at the highest risk for complications from RSV if you're an older adult?

Yeah, you're absolutely on target there, Jonathan. So respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, it's common, it's contagious, and it's potentially serious.

It can affect our lungs and our breathing passageways. And many people, including myself as a pediatrician, associate RSV as an infant or a pediatric disease.

But the reality is, and we're learning more in the last number of years as we do additional research into the epidemiology, putting surveillance systems place and testing right because you don't know about anything unless you can test for it when we actually start to look at this we see that RSV affects people of all ages and is quite common in adults, particularly over the age of 60.

Testing, Symptoms, and When to Seek Care

And the reality is that people at increased risk for severe illness from RSV, meaning hospitalizations, death include adults over the age of 60, especially adults over the age of 60 with certain underlying medical conditions such as chronic heart, chronic lung disease.

weakened immune systems, other diseases like diabetes and obesity, living in nursing homes. We have the knowledge now to know that, for example, there's about 177,000 hospitalizations each year in the US in adults over the age of 65 due to RSV.

And yeah, that's a wow number. And what's even more wow is that of that 177,000 hospitalizations, about 14,000 adults over 65 will die due to RSV every year in the United States.

But there's good news behind this because this is now the second season where finally there's available a vaccine for adults to help protect adults against RSV.

Good. So let me just ask, how do you differentiate, I mean, if you're not vaccinated, how do you differentiate RSV from a common cold? Because what Jennifer was just describing sounded like just a common cold until it finally got to her after a couple of weeks.

Yeah, the only way to differentiate is to test because the signs, the symptoms of RSV, of COVID, of influenza, they overlap. So the only way to know is to test.

But the best way actually is to prevent it to start with. And that is the power of vaccination. Good. I want to get to that vaccination, but I want to stick with the symptoms a little bit more.

So if I just get a common cold, I don't think of going to a doctor. But when I do get a common cold, when should I think about visiting a doctor to get tested?

Right. Well, of course, every individual is going to be different. So if you're an adult over the age of 60 who has a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or congestive heart failure or a weakened immune system, your trigger for getting medical care and speaking with your health care provider would likely be different than if you're an adult over the age of 60 without any underlying medical conditions.

But people know their bodies. Jennifer was describing that she called it the tipping point. So you got to the point where she said, I need to take control of this.

RSV Vaccination Guidance for Older Adults

This is interfering. It's changing what I'm doing. People will sort of follow their own health and sort of know when to get care. But again, you know, that's putting a lot of burden on people as well.

And in the case of RSV, also, you can get the diagnosis, but there is no specific treatment. So that is what the power of prevention and the power of vaccination offers to our societies, the ability to prevent disease rather than to have to treat it.

Got it. And how often should we take the RSV vaccine? Is it once a year or once in a lifetime? How often? Yeah, that's a great question, Jonathan. I'm glad you asked that.

So as I mentioned, this is the second RSV season, the second year where there are now for the first time vaccines available for adults to help protect against RSV?

Well, it's recommended for people 60 and older. So what are the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control? or adults 60 to 74 with certain risk factors for severe RSV disease, COPD, ingestive heart failure, diabetes, et cetera.

And a single dose for people 75 and older, just because they're 75 and older places them at increased risk. So it's a single dose vaccination right now.

What's important is to take today's information and want to learn more. So we have a website, Jonathan, it's sidelinersv.com, sidelinersv.com. We don't want people to get sidelined from the illness.

We can learn more about RSV, the disease, about vaccination, speak to your doctor, speak to your pharmacist. Great. And just before we leave, Jennifer, what do you want people to take away from your experience and this video?

Well, I think the single most important thing to remember is that RSV is not an anomaly among adults, particularly adults 60 and older. It doesn't just affect young children and infants.

Jennifer's Takeaway and Closing Remarks

And that I would encourage people to go speak to their doctor or their physician or whoever their health care provider is and really discuss their potential risk for RSV.

Good, great, thank you. Thank you both so much for being here today. We've been talking with Jennifer Beals, renowned actor and executive producer, and Dr.

Leonard Friedland, who's now a research scientist. They're both here today with GSK. Thanks for being with us, and thanks for bringing us this message.

Thank you, Jennifer. And remember, everybody, as we always say at the end of every show, go to health. Take care. We'll see you again. Bye bye. this week to GoToHealth Media.

Be sure to join Jonathan Marks and another health expert next time. You can also catch the program on your favorite podcast platform. Until our next show, be sure to visit us on the web at gotohealthmedia.com and elevate your life.