

# Information for Parents about Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)



The Pharmacy Department  
4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
604-875-2867 • 1-877-625-7888  
[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

## What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a virus that affects the lungs and airways. It is one of the most common viruses in infancy and childhood. Researchers say that almost all children have had RSV by the age of 3 years. It is the most frequent cause of lower respiratory tract infection in children.

## How do you catch RSV?

RSV is very easy to catch. It is spread by contact such as touching, kissing, or shaking hands with a person infected with RSV. It can also be spread by touching countertops, toys, Kleenex or any other surfaces. RSV viruses can last for hours on these objects after an infected person has touched them. You can catch the infection when infectious material touches your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also catch it by inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough from an infected person. RSV is around all year but is most active from November to April.

## Is RSV serious?

Most children that get RSV will experience a minor cold which will resolve in 1 to 2 weeks. In a small number of children, RSV can develop into a more severe infection, especially in children who:

- Are born premature
- Have chronic lung disease
- Have heart disease

## What are the symptoms of RSV?

The symptoms of RSV are often like that of the common cold:

- Runny nose/nasal congestion
- Cough
- Low grade fever
- Decreased appetite

The symptoms can get worse if the virus moves lower and causes inflammation of the lungs.

Symptoms could include:

- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- Wheezing
- Difficulty feeding

## How do I protect my child against RSV?

There are things that you can do to reduce your child's risk of getting RSV:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap. You can also use an alcohol based cleanser before touching your baby and ask others to do the same. **Good and frequent hand washing is the best way to prevent RSV infection.**
- Keep your child away from people who have colds or who are sick. **This includes saying no visiting to family/friends if they are ill.**
- Avoid crowded places such as, church, daycare centers, and shopping malls.
- Ensure that your child is not exposed to second hand smoke.
- Talk to your child's doctor about influenza immunization at 6 months of age.
- Do not share personal items such as cups, utensils, washcloths, and towels with persons who are ill.