

Information for Parents about Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV



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Is RSV serious?

Most children that get RSV will experience a minor cold which will go away 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
- Are less than 6 months old

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 time they are three. It is the most frequent cause of lower respiratory tract infection in children. You can learn more about the lungs and the respiratory system at: www.aboutkidshealth.ca/BCCH/En/HowTheBodyWorks

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.

There is an increased chance of catching RSV if your child:

- Attends day care.
- Has a sibling who attends day care.
- Lives in a household with 5 or more people.
- Is exposed to second hand smoke.
- Is exposed to crowded environments.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

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

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Cough
- Low grade fever (less than 38.5° C or 101° F)
- Not feeling hungry

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

- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- Unusual or long pauses of breathing
- Wheezing
- Difficulty feeding

When should I take my child to the doctor?

If your child seems to be getting sicker, with more rapid breathing, a wheezy sound, high temperature or is having a harder time feeding they should be seen by a doctor. If they are having a lot of trouble breathing they should be taken to emergency as soon as possible.

How do I protect my child against RSV?

- **Clean your hands** each time before touching your baby and ask others to do the same. You can use warm water and soap or an alcohol based cleanser. More information about good hand washing is available at: http://www.cw.bc.ca/library/pdf/pamphlets/PHSA311_HowToHandRubWash_2010_Dec17.pdf
- Keep your child away from people who have colds or who are sick. **This includes saying “No visiting” to family and friends if they are ill.**
- Try to avoid crowded places such as, church, daycare centers, and shopping malls during the RSV season from November to April.
- Keep your child away from second hand smoke, smokers who have recently smoked and clothes that smell of smoke.
- Do not share personal items such as cups, washcloths, and towels with people who are ill.
- Breastfeed your child. It may help protect your child from catching RSV.