

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and your child



What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a very common respiratory virus. It affects the lungs and airways. Most children get RSV by the time they are two years old.

In some children, RSV causes a lung infection. You can learn more about the lungs and the respiratory system at [Respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\) \(aboutkidshealth.ca\)](https://aboutkidshealth.ca).

Is RSV serious?

Most children that get RSV will have cold symptoms for a couple of days. In BC, a small number (1-2%) of healthy children under 1 year old need hospital care for RSV.

A small number of children develop more serious infections. This is more likely if your child:

- Was born premature,
- Has a chronic health condition (like a chronic lung disease or congenital heart disease), or
- Had an immune disorder.

How do you catch RSV?

RSV is very easy to catch. It spreads by contact, like touching, kissing, or shaking hands with a person that has RSV. The RSV virus also lasts for hours on any surface, like toys, countertops, and tissues.

You can get an RSV infection when you the virus touches your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also catch it when you inhale droplets after someone with RSV sneezes or coughs. RSV is around all year but is most active during fall and winter months.

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

- Goes to daycare
- Has a sibling who goes to daycare
- Lives in a household with 5 or more people
- Is exposed to second hand smoke
- Is exposed to crowded environments

What are RSV symptoms?

Often, RSV symptoms are like cold symptoms:

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Cough
- Fever
- Not feeling hungry

If the virus moves down into the lungs, the lungs can get inflamed. This makes the infection worse. Symptoms of a serious infection include:

- Difficulty breathing, or fast breathing
- Unusual or long pauses in breathing
- Wheezing
- Difficulty feeding

When should I get help?

Bring your child to their primary-care provider if they:

- Seem to be getting sicker
- Are breathing quickly
- Make a wheezy sound when they breathe
- Have a high fever, or
- Have difficulty feeding.

If your child has trouble breathing, this is a medical emergency. Go to your closest emergency room.

How can I help protect my child from RSV?

Clean your hands each time before you touch your child. Ask others to do the same. Use soap and warm water, or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can learn more about cleaning your hands at [Hand Hygiene \(bccdc.ca\)](https://bccdc.ca)

- Keep your child away from people who are ill. **Do not allow family and friends to visit if they are ill.**
- Keep your child away from second hand smoke, people who have recently smoked, and clothes that smell of smoke.
- Do not share personal items like cups, washcloths, and towels with people who are ill.
- Breastfeed your child. It helps protect your child from catching RSV.