

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

## What is RSV?

- RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms.
- Most individuals recover in 1-2 weeks. Symptoms are typically at their worst on days 3-5 of illness.
- RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in children younger than 1 year of age.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Cold symptoms may include:
  - Fever (temperature of 100.4 or higher)
  - Cough (dry or wet)
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Sneezing
  - Fussiness
  - Poor feeding
- Children may also present with signs of respiratory difficulty (listed below). If any of the following symptoms are present, please contact your pediatrician.
  - Fast breathing
  - Flaring of the nostril
  - Head bobbing with breathing
  - Rhythmic grunting during breathing
  - Wheezing
  - Chest wall retractions - when a baby must use muscles between their ribs or neck to breathe. Watch your child's rib cage as they inhale - if you see it "caving in" and forming an upside-down "V" shape under the neck, then they are working too hard.

## Diagnosis

- Your pediatrician may do a nasal swab to determine if your child has RSV or another virus.
- Since most children recover without difficulty and because there is no treatment for RSV, these tests are not always necessary.

## When does RSV commonly occur?

- RSV is typically a fall and winter virus, but can occur at any time of the year.

## Who is at risk for severe illness?

- Premature infants
- Very young infants, especially those 6 months and younger
- Children younger than 2 years old with chronic lung disease or congenital (present from birth) heart disease
- Children with weakened immune systems
- Children who have neuromuscular disorders, including those who have difficulty swallowing or clearing mucus secretions

## When should you call the doctor?

- Call your pediatrician right away if your child has any:
  - Symptoms of respiratory difficulty
  - Symptoms of dehydration (fewer than 1 wet diaper every 8 hours)
  - Gray or blue color to tongue, lips, or skin
  - Significantly decreased activity and alertness
- Some children with RSV may be at increased risk of developing secondary bacterial infections, such as an ear infections. Call your doctor if your child has:
  - Symptoms that worsen or don't start to improve after 7 days
  - A fever and they are younger than 3 months of age
  - A fever that rises above 104 repeatedly for a child of any age.
  - Poor sleep or fussiness, chest pain, ear tugging or ear drainage.

## Is it contagious?

- Yes - RSV spreads like a common-cold virus from one person to another. It enters the body through the nose or eyes, usually from:
  - Direct person-to-person contact with saliva, mucus, or nasal discharge.
  - Unclean hands - RSV can survive 30 minutes or more in unwashed hands.
  - Unclean objects or surfaces - RSV can survive up to 6 hours on surfaces, toys, keyboards, door knobs, etc.

## What can you do to help your child feel better?

- There is no cure for RSV and medications, like steroids and antibiotics, do not help with RSV.
- To help your child feel more comfortable, begin by doing what you would do for any cold.
  - Nasal saline with gentle suctioning to allow easier breathing and feeding.
  - Cool-mist humidifier to help break up mucus and allow easier breathing.
  - Make sure your child is staying hydrated. Encourage fluids and frequent feedings.
    - Infants with a common cold may feed more slowly or not feel like eating, because they are having trouble breathing due to the congestion. Try to suction the baby's nose before attempting to breast- or bottle-feed.
    - Supplementation with water or formula is unnecessary for breastfed babies.
    - If it is difficult for the baby to feed at the breast, try expressing breastmilk into a cup or a bottle.
    - Oral electrolyte solutions (such as Pedialyte and Enfalyte) can be used.
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help with fever and discomfort. Always avoid aspirin in children who are sick. Do not use ibuprofen if your child is under 6 months of age.

## How can you protect your child from RSV?

- **Wash your hands!** Use soap and water and scrub for at least 20 seconds. Remind children to practice good hand hygiene as well throughout the year.
- **Vaccinate.** Keep your children up to date on their immunizations and ensure the whole family gets annual flu vaccines.
- **Limit your baby's exposure** to crowds, other children, and anyone with a cold. Keep them home from school or child care when they are sick.
- **Disinfect objects and surfaces** in your home regularly and avoid exposing your child to smoke from tobacco or other substances.

## When can your child return to daycare?

- Children are thought to be contagious for 5-8 days, but others can be contagious for as long as a month.
- There is no way to tell if your child is still contagious.
- A good rule of thumb is that they can return to daycare/school once:
  - They have had no fever for at least 24 hours (without fever medicine).
  - They are eating and drinking well.
  - Cough is improving.
- We encourage you to check with your child's daycare provider on their specific guidelines for returning to care.