

RSV

What is RSV?

RSV is caused by a virus called respiratory syncytial virus. It is the most common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in children under 1 year of age and the most frequent cause of winter colds in children under the age of three. Almost 100% of children get RSV in their first two years, but only a small percentage develop severe disease. RSV most commonly occurs between the months of November and April, however, the timing of the season may differ among locations and from year to year.

Symptoms of RSV

The symptoms of RSV are similar to other respiratory infections. Symptoms include:

- Cough
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Fever
- Decrease in appetite

Wheezing may also occur. In very young infants, irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties may be the only symptoms of infection.

How Can I Help Prevent RSV?

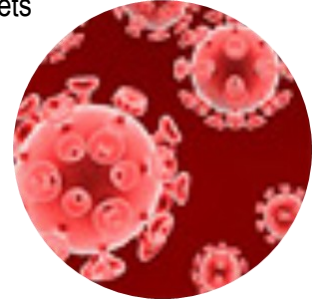
No vaccine is available for RSV. In order to prevent the spread of infection, people, especially those with cold-like symptoms, should:

- Cover their coughs and sneezes
- Wash their hands frequently and correctly (with soap and water for 15-20 seconds)
- Avoid sharing their cups and eating utensils
- Refrain from kissing others
- Clean contaminated surfaces such as doorknobs and countertops

Special attention should be paid to protecting children who are at high risk for developing severe disease if infected with RSV such as premature infants, children under two with chronic lung or heart conditions, and children with weakened immune systems. People with cold-like symptoms should try to avoid interaction with these children.

How do People get RSV?

RSV can be spread through the air, when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplets linger in the air and can be inhaled through the mouth or nose or come in contact with the eyes. Infection can also result from direct or indirect contact with oral or nasal secretions from an infected person. Direct contact includes actions like kissing the face of a child with RSV. Indirect contact occurs when the virus gets on a surface, like a doorknob, that is then touched by other people. An infected person may be contagious for 3 to 8, however, those with weakened immune systems can be contagious for as long as 4 weeks. Illness usually begins 4 to 6 days after exposure.



Diagnosis and Treatment of RSV

There is no specific treatment for RSV infection, but the following can help lessen symptoms and duration of illness:

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Call your doctor if the cold symptoms appear to interfere with your child's ability to sleep or drink, or if your child is having difficult or rapid breathing.
- If needed, you can ask the doctor about using a non-aspirin product (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) to reduce fever and discomfort. **Aspirin should not be used in children with viral illness since it has been associated with the development of Reyes Syndrome.**
- If the doctor prescribes medicine for your child, give all the medicine as directed.

Visits to a healthcare provider for an RSV infection are very common. RSV can be diagnosed through a laboratory test provided by a health care provider. The healthcare provider will assess the severity of the disease to determine if the patient should be hospitalized. In the most severe cases of disease, infants may require supplemental oxygen, suctioning of mucus from the airways, or intubation (having breathing tubes inserted) with mechanical ventilation. RSV in older children and adults is usually very mild. Some children under the age of three may develop more serious infections from RSV such as pneumonia, bronchitis, or an ear infection. Premature infants and children with heart or lung disease or weak immune systems have a greater risk of developing complications.

For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov.