

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Information Sheet

What is RSV?

RSV is a common virus which can cause infections of the nose, throat, and lungs. Infections with RSV generally occur during fall, winter, and spring. Anyone can get RSV, but infants and very young children are at the greatest risk for severe infections. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (swelling of small passageways in the lungs) and pneumonia in infants less than 1 year old.

How can you catch RSV?

RSV can be spread through the coughs and sneezes of sick people. Droplets of fluid from an infected person's nose and mouth can get into your nose, eyes, or mouth and make you sick. The illness can also be spread by touching surfaces contaminated with these droplets, such as doorknobs or tables, and then rubbing your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Illness usually begins 2-8 days after being exposed to the virus. Usually symptoms appear in stages, not all at once. Symptoms can include:

- Runny nose
- Decreased appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

In very young infants, irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties may be the only symptoms.

How can you be treated for RSV?

There is no specific treatment for RSV infection. Most people will get better on their own in 1 to 2 weeks. For mild cases, your doctor may recommend extra fluids to prevent dehydration and medicine to relieve the fever. In severe cases, infants may require extra oxygen, removal of mucus from airways using suction, or breathing tubes with a machine to help the child breathe.

How can you prevent RSV?

To avoid RSV infection:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Wipe hard surfaces with soap and water or disinfectant
- Avoid sharing cups or utensils with others
- Avoid contact with others, especially young children, when you are experiencing cold-like symptoms