

**What is RSV?**

**PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

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RSV is the abbreviation for Respiratory Syncytial Virus, a common virus that causes mild respiratory symptoms similar to the common cold. The RSV season is typically active Fall through Spring. This virus affects most children before they are 2 years old. The symptoms are usually minor, however some babies can become very ill from this virus, particularly if they were premature or low birth weight infants and/or those with immune system, heart or lung problems.

RSV is the leading cause of pneumonia and bronchiolitis in children under 2 years of age.

**How is RSV spread?**

RSV is highly contagious. It is spread through physical contact with an infected person, such as through touching, kissing, and shaking hands. It is also spread through sneezing and coughing. The virus can live for several hours in tissues and on hard surfaces, such as on countertops.

Factors that put a child at higher risk for RSV include:

- ✚ Living in crowded households
- ✚ Presence of tobacco smoke and other air pollutants that irritate the infant's lungs
- ✚ Other children in the household
- ✚ Children sharing bedrooms
- ✚ Children who attend daycare
- ✚ Children from multiple births (twins, triplets)
- ✚ Family history of asthma.

## What are the symptoms of RSV?

### Minor symptoms include:

- ✚ Runny nose
- ✚ Coughing
- ✚ Low-grade fever

### Symptoms of a more serious infection include:

- ✚ Difficult or rapid breathing
- ✚ Wheezing, which is a whistling sound when breathing
- ✚ Irritability and/or restlessness
- ✚ Gasping for breath
- ✚ "Wet" cough

## How is RSV treated?

Minor cases of RSV usually resolve on their own within 5 to 7 days. If your child is under 6 months old and has a fever, cough, or is acting lethargic, please contact your pediatrician. If your child is having breathing problems, it is important to contact your pediatrician right away. Depending upon the severity, your pediatrician may discuss the possibility of hospitalization to manage the infection. Supportive treatment will be provided at the hospital, such as medication for fever and fluid therapy.

## Can RSV be prevented?

There are ways to protect your baby from RSV. **One of the most important things that you can do to prevent the spread of RSV is good hand washing before touching your child.** Individuals can be exposed to RSV and pass it on to their children without knowing it. Other prevention measures include:

- ✚ Keep your child away from crowds during RSV season, especially crowds of young children.
- ✚ Keep people with colds/respiratory infections away from your child.
- ✚ Do not smoke near your child because tobacco smoke increases the risk of RSV.
- ✚ Wash your child's toys and bedding frequently.

There is also medication available that your pediatrician may prescribe for infants who meet the criteria to reduce the risk of RSV depending upon whether your child is at high risk for infection. The medication is given by injection on a monthly basis during the RSV season.

Speak with your health care provider if you have questions regarding the risk of RSV infection in your child and the need for preventative medication.

*Source:* Abbott Laboratories, Inc. (2005). A parent's guide to understanding respiratory syncytial virus. Gaithersburg, MD: MedImmune.

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2005). Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)—Treatment and prevention. Retrieved November 2005 from [www.medem.com](http://www.medem.com)

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