

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

This handout tells you about the symptoms and treatment of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). If you have more questions, please contact your child's clinic, doctor, or nurse.

What is RSV?

RSV is one of the most important causes of lung infection in infants and young children. RSV affects small airways in the lung called bronchioles (brank-ee-oles). You may also hear it called bronchiolitis (brank-ee-ol-itis). RSV is a very common lung infection. By the age of three, most children will have had RSV.

When does RSV occur?

RSV occurs most often in the winter and spring months.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of RSV are like the common cold. Most children will have mild cold symptoms like a clear runny nose, fever and cough. Some children with RSV will also get an ear infection. Children will have a mild fever (less than 101° F) for a few days, a runny nose for 1-2 weeks, and a cough which may last for several weeks. Some children can get a serious RSV infection. These children will have fast breathing and may be struggling to breathe.

When should I call the doctor?

You should call your doctor if your child has cold symptoms and is:

- Breathing fast—more than 40-60 times a minute for an infant; more than 30-40 times a minute for a young child.

- Struggling to breathe.
 - Chest is pulling in between ribs or above breastbone with breathing.
 - Nostrils are flaring out with breathing.
 - Child is making a grunting noise with breathing.
- Bluish in color around nose and mouth or fingertips.
- Having a temperature over 101°F.
- Wheezing with breathing or coughing.
- Looking very tired.
- Eating or drinking poorly.
- Having other serious medical problems, such as heart, lung or immune system disease, or was premature with lung disease developing after birth.

How is it treated?

Most children with mild RSV will get better in several weeks on their own. A loose cough may last up to six weeks. If your child has a fever, your child's doctor may suggest Tylenol® to make your child feel better. Encourage small amounts of fluids (water, juice or popsicles) often if your child has a fever. Children with a serious case, may need to stay in the hospital for treatment. Treatment for RSV could include oxygen, intravenous (I.V.) fluids, and aerosol cool mist medicines to ease breathing, along with other therapies or medicines ordered by your child's doctor.

Can my child get RSV again?

Yes, a child with RSV may get RSV again in the future, although future infections may not be as severe. Adults can also get RSV, although symptoms are mostly like a cold.

How can I help prevent the spread of RSV?

RSV spreads by coming in close contact with an infected person and the droplets they produce when they cough or sneeze. The best way to prevent the spread of RSV is with careful hand washing using soap and warm water. If your child is in a clinic or hospital with possible RSV, they will be placed in a room with the door closed. This will lessen the chance that another child would get exposed. You also may be asked to wear a mask, gown or gloves while in your child's room. Please leave these items in your child's room, and do careful hand washing followed by hand gel before leaving the room.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©3/2018. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4319.