



INFECTION PREVENTION & YOU

WHAT IS RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that infects the respiratory tract. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in children under 1 year of age. Most children will have been infected with the virus by their second birthday. RSV can be dangerous for some young children.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread through coughing and sneezing, close contact with someone who has the virus, or touching a contaminated surface like a doorknob or a phone and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. RSV can live on the hands for up to 30 minutes but can survive for several hours on surfaces.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, sneezing, runny nose, fever, and a decrease in appetite. Young infants may also experience irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties. Some adults may have more severe symptoms consistent with a lower respiratory tract infection, such as pneumonia.

- People who are infected are contagious and can spread the virus for 3–8 days. Infants or immunosuppressed patients may continue to spread the virus for 3–4 weeks.

Who gets RSV?

Anyone can become infected with RSV. Those at high risk for severe illness from RSV include:

- infants and young children
- older adults, especially those 65 years and older
- adults with chronic lung or heart disease
- adults with weakened immune systems

What is the treatment for RSV?

There is no treatment for RSV other than over-the-counter medication to manage symptoms. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration.

How can you prevent RSV?

Researchers are working to develop RSV vaccines, but none are available yet. A drug called palivizumab (pah-lih-VIH-zu-mahb) is available to prevent serious RSV illness in certain infants and children who are at high risk for severe disease. The drug can help prevent serious RSV disease, but it cannot help cure or treat children already suffering from serious RSV disease.

Good hygiene practices can help prevent the spread of RSV:

- Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your face.
- Stay home when you are sick, and stay away from sick people.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve, and then wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces on a regular basis.
- Wear a mask when near people with RSV who are coughing and sneezing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CDC—Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV): <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>

CDC—Handwashing: Clean hands save lives: https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Ffeatures%2Fhandwashing%2Findex.html

Red Book. 32nd Edition—Respiratory Syncytial Virus pp. 628-636.