

## **What is respiratory syncytial virus?**

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory illness of childhood. RSV is the most common cause of pneumonia and of inflammation of small airways of the lungs in infants and children under one year of age. In fact by age two, most children will have had RSV.

## **Who can get RSV?**

Anyone can get RSV but infection is most commonly found in children under two years of age. It is the number one cause of pneumonia and lower respiratory infections in children under the age of 1 year of age and a substantial cause of illness as well as death in older adults

## **What are the symptoms of RSV infection?**

Symptoms for most people are mild and very hard to tell the difference from those caused by the common cold such as fever, runny nose, cough, and sore throat. Chills, headache, general aching, fatigue or lack of appetite may also occur. Between 25% to 40% of infants and children develop pneumonia. Generally when adults are infected with RSV, the infection either produces mild, cold-like symptoms, or no symptoms at all. Most adults have been exposed to RSV many different times in their lives but are still able to be infected by RSV. For the very young, the elderly, and people with chronic conditions symptoms can be more severe and including wheezing, shortness of breath, pneumonia and sometimes death.

## **How are people infected with RSV?**

People are infected with RSV by breathing in virus particles spread into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Less often, people get a RSV infection from an infected person that does not wash their hands or use an alcohol based-hand gel with at least 60% alcohol after coughing or sneezing into them. In this way, the virus can be transferred from an infected persons' hands by shaking hands, touching contaminated surfaces and a healthy person touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

## **When is RSV Season?**

RSV season starts anytime during the late fall or winter and continues into the spring much like the flu.

## **Can RSV be treated?**

For children with mild disease, no specific treatment is necessary other than the treatment of symptoms. People with severe disease may require oxygen therapy and respiratory medications for hospitalized people. For most people, treatment includes plenty of rest, fluids, and fever reducing medications. Children who are very ill should not be treated with aspirin for a fever. Aspirin use has been associated with Reye Syndrome when given during certain viral illnesses.

## **Should I stay home from work or school, or keep my child out of child care with an RSV infection?**

To prevent the spread of illness, adults and children should stay home from work, school, and/or day care with a fever, or upper respiratory symptoms such as a cough.

## **What can be done to control or prevent RSV?**

Unfortunately there is no vaccine to protect against RSV. Palivizumab and Respiratory Virus Immune Globulin Intravenous (RSV-IGIV) are licensed by the Food and Drug Administration for use in preventing severe RSV in high-risk infants, children younger than 24 months with chronic lung disease, and certain preterm infants.

## **What other ways can prevent or control RSV (Continued on other side)?**

Good hygiene habits prevent and reduce the transmission of RSV by:

- covering your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing
- disposing of tissues properly
- washing hands frequently
- using alcohol-based hand sanitizers if hands are not visibly soiled

**What other ways can prevent or control RSV (continued)?**

When sick with a fever and cough:

- stay home from work, school, church, or other daily activities outside of the home
- avoid other crowded areas or events like shopping malls or sports arenas
- do not visit nursing homes, hospitals, or other long-term care facilities
- do not visit people at increased risk for severe complications

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