

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a contagious viral disease that can lead to serious health problems—especially for young children and older adults. RSV infects the lungs and breathing passages.

Most otherwise healthy people recover from RSV infection in 1 to 2 weeks. However, infection can be severe in some people, such as certain infants, young children, and older adults.

In fact, RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia in children under 1 year of age in the United States. In addition, RSV is more often being recognized as an important cause of respiratory illness in older adults.

**Facts about RSV**

- It is a contagious viral disease that may infect a person's lungs and breathing passages.
- Almost everyone gets RSV by age 2.
- People can get the disease more than once.
- Most people recover from the disease in a week or two, but RSV can be severe, most commonly for children 6 months of age and younger and for older adults. Premature infants or those with lung or heart problems are especially at risk for serious disease.
- The number of RSV cases typically rise in the fall, peak in the winter, and decline in early spring, but the exact timing of RSV season varies by location.
- There is no vaccine to prevent RSV

**Symptoms**

RSV symptoms are like those of many other respiratory illnesses. Infants and young children may experience a fever, reduced appetite, runny nose, cough, and wheezing. Older children and adults may have a runny nose, sore throat, headache, cough, and a feeling of general sickness. RSV also can lead to more serious illnesses, such as pneumonia and bronchiolitis, in both children and adults.

**Transmission**

RSV spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes, sending respiratory droplets into the air. These droplets contain RSV and can end up in other people's mouths or noses, where they can cause infection. The droplets can also land on objects that people touch, such as toys or countertops. People can be exposed to and possibly infected by RSV by touching these objects and then touching their mouths or noses. Children often pass the virus to one another at their school or daycare center.

## **Prevention**

To help prevent the spread of RSV, follow these tips if you have cold-like symptoms should:

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 15–20 seconds
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils with others
- Refrain from kissing others

There is no vaccine to protect against RSV. However, for children at high risk for serious disease, such as certain premature infants and infants with certain lung and heart conditions, monthly shots with a drug called palivizumab can help prevent serious illness during RSV season. Ask your healthcare provider if your child would be a good candidate for the drug.

## **When to seek medical care**

If you think that you or your child might have an RSV infection that requires medical care, schedule an appointment with a healthcare provider. Such visits are common for young children. The healthcare provider will evaluate the severity of the illness and decide how best to treat it. RSV symptoms in most infants, children, and adults clear up on their own in a week or two.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
2/2010