



Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV)

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial (sin-SISH-uhl) virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. RSV is most common during fall, winter and spring.

Who can get RSV?

Almost all children will have had an RSV infection by their second birthday. It is also a significant cause of respiratory illness in older adults.

People at highest risk for severe disease include:

- premature infants
- young children with congenital (from birth) heart or chronic lung disease
- young children with weakened immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment
- adults with weakened immune systems
- older adults, especially those with underlying heart or lung disease

If you or your child are at high risk for severe RSV disease, talk to your healthcare provider.

How is RSV spread?

RSV can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You can get infected if you get droplets from the cough or sneeze in your eyes, nose, or mouth. Additionally, it can spread through direct contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV.

RSV can survive for many hours on hard surfaces such as tables, crib rails and doorknobs. You can become infected if you touch a surface that has the virus on it, and then touch your face before washing your hands.

People infected with RSV can usually spread the virus for 3 to 8 days. However, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, can continue to spread the virus even after they stop showing symptoms, for as long as 4 weeks.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

People infected with RSV usually show symptoms within 4 to 6 days after getting infected.

Symptoms of RSV infection usually include:

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

In very young infants with RSV, the only symptoms may be irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties.

RSV can also cause more severe infections such as bronchiolitis, (an inflammation of the small airways in the lung), and pneumonia, (an infection of the lungs).

How is RSV diagnosed and treated?

Most RSV infections go away on their own in a week or two. Call a doctor if you or your child are having difficulty breathing, not drinking enough fluids, or experiencing worsening symptoms. The doctor will diagnose and evaluate how severe the RSV infection is and whether hospitalization is needed.

There is no specific treatment for RSV infection. Fever and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).

How can you protect against RSV?

Protect yourself and others from RSV infection:

- **Wash your hands often.**
- **Keep your hands off your face.**
- **Avoid close contact with sick people.**
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.**
- **Clean and disinfect surfaces.**
- **Stay home and keep children at home when you/they are sick.**

Adapted from: "Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022 Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html> (accessed 1 November 2022)

Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit

Continental Building, 25 Church Street, Hamilton, HM 12, Bermuda

P.O. Box HM 1195, Hamilton HM EX, Bermuda

Phone: (+1 441) 278-6503

Fax: (+1 441) 296-3283

E-mail: epidemiology@gov.bm or jdwilson@gov.bm