

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

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## What is it?

- RSV is a common virus that can cause mild to severe respiratory illness in infants, children and adults.
- It is hard to tell the difference between mild RSV and the common cold. Severe respiratory illness is more common in people who have heart and lung problems or have a weak immune system.

### Mild RSV

- fever
- runny nose
- cough

### Severe RSV

- high fever
- extreme breathing problems
- coughing, wheezing, grunting
- can result in bronchiolitis and pneumonia

- Once you have been exposed to RSV it takes about 4 days to get sick.
- Most people will recover from RSV in 8 to 15 days but it may take up to 4 weeks.
- RSV can develop at any time of year but it is more common in the winter months and early spring.

## My child is sick. When should I call the doctor?

Call your doctor or Telehealth Ontario if you are concerned or notice that your child:

- feeds or eats poorly
- has fewer wet diapers in a day
- has flushed skin or feels hot
- has difficulty breathing
- is less active than usual
- has blue colour of the lips or around the mouth
- is pale or looks unwell
- is coughing so much that he/she gags or vomits

## How is it spread?

- RSV is spread through coughing and sneezing and close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces and objects.
- RSV can live up to 6 hours on a surface.
- You can get RSV more than once since you do not stay completely immune once you have had it.

## Is there treatment for it?

- For mild RSV, no specific treatment is needed other than the treatment of symptoms. For example, acetaminophen can be given to reduce a fever. **Do not give ASA (aspirin) to children.**
- For those with severe RSV a hospital stay may be needed to treat breathing problems.
- There are some treatments that may help those who are at high risk of developing severe RSV.
- Talk with your family doctor to see what treatment is right for you.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Clean hands well and often.
- Do not get too close to people who are coughing or sneezing.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve – not your hand.
- Clean and disinfect shared toys and equipment.
- Try to stay away from crowds and people with colds, if your child has a weak immune system.
- Do not visit family members or visitors in a hospital or health care facility if you have a cold or fever.

## For more information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>

