

Fact Sheet

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?

RSV is a major cause of respiratory illness in people, most common in infants and young children, but may infect adults. Most people experience mild illness and recover in 1-2 weeks, but some people can become very ill and require hospital care.

People at greatest risk for severe illness include children under the age of 2, older adults especially those 65 years old or older, and people (of any age) who have heart or lung conditions or a weakened immune system.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

- Begins with fever, runny nose, cough and sometimes wheezing
- Lethargy, irritability and poor feeding
- Chronic lung conditions and asthma may be aggravated by RSV
- Infants and children with heart or respiratory problems are at increased risk of pneumonia and other complications from RSV

*If your baby is having difficulty breathing or feeding, seek medical attention.

What is the treatment for RSV?

There is no specific treatment for RSV. Health care providers may prescribe over-the-counter medication such as Tylenol to manage symptoms such as fever and pain. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration. Those at risk for severe disease may need to be hospitalized if they are dehydrated or have trouble breathing.

How is RSV spread?

- Through close contact, when an infected person sneezes or coughs and the virus gets into your body through your eyes, nose or mouth
- By touching infected surfaces or objects that the virus has landed on, and then touching your face without washing your hands
- The virus can survive on surfaces/objects (phones, toys, doorknobs) for many hours

For how long is an infected person able to spread RSV?

Infected individuals spread RSV for as long as they are ill (usually 3-8 days).

How can RSV be prevented?

- Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces/objects (toys, doorknobs, phones); do not share eating utensils if you are ill
- Avoid taking infants and children to public gatherings when there is a lot of respiratory illness in your community.
- If you are sick, stay away from others. Cover your cough or sneeze and wash your hands.
- Build up and maintain your immune system through healthy eating, exercise, getting enough rest, avoid tobacco and alcohol, and managing stress.