

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Information Sheet

What is RSV?

RSV is a virus that causes respiratory tract infections. It is a major cause of respiratory illness in young children and infants. It can also cause serious illness in the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

What are the symptoms?

Mild illness symptoms include a low grade fever, cough, wheezing, and runny nose. Sometimes there is severe illness where pneumonia, bronchiolitis, ear infections and tonsillitis can result. Hospitalization is sometimes necessary. Symptoms can last a few days to a few weeks.

Who is at risk for RSV?

Premature infants and children with lung disease, heart disease and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for acquiring RSV.

Is there a treatment?

There is no treatment for mild illness. For severe illness, antiviral drugs can be given. There is no vaccine at present.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread through direct contact with infected secretions (e.g. sneezing, coughing). RSV can also be spread by contact with infected secretions on hands, countertops, toys, tissues and eating utensils.

What can be done to prevent the spread of RSV?

To prevent the spread of RSV, wash hands often with soap and water, dispose of soiled tissues, cover one's mouth when coughing or sneezing and clean commonly used items/areas such as countertops, toys and eating utensils frequently.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. Reinfection with RSV is common but illness is generally milder.

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