

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV): Know the Risks and How to Prevent

What is RSV and Who is at Risk?

- 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.
- Almost all children are infected with the virus by their second birthday, but only a small percentage develops severe disease.
- Premature infants, children less than 2 years of age with congenital heart disease or chronic lung disease, and children with compromised (weakened) immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment are at highest risk for severe disease. Adults with compromised immune systems and those aged 65 years and older are also at increased risk of severe disease.
- RSV infections generally occur in the United States from November to April. However, the timing of the season may differ among locations and from year to year.

What are the Symptoms of RSV?

- Symptoms of RSV infection are similar to other respiratory infections (coughing, sneezing, runny nose, fever, and decrease in appetite). Wheezing may also occur.
- Irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties may be the only symptoms of infection in very young infants.
- Most otherwise healthy infants infected with RSV do not need to be hospitalized. In most cases, even among those who need to be hospitalized, hospitalization usually lasts a few days, and recovery from illness usually occurs in about 1 to 2 weeks.

How Can RSV Be Prevented?

- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Frequent hand washing
- Avoid close contact with infected persons
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils with infected persons
- Clean contaminated surfaces (such as doorknobs)
- A drug called palivizumab is available to prevent severe RSV illness in certain infants and children who are at high risk.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection. Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.cdc.gov/rsv/about/faq.html>. Accessed October 31, 2013.