

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus

## Information for the Public

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### **What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus?**

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common virus that causes cold-like symptoms. It is most common in the fall, winter, and early spring. It is very common in children under 5 years old and almost all children get RSV before they turn 2 years old. Most cases of RSV clear up after one to two weeks, but RSV can cause serious illness, such as pneumonia or bronchiolitis, especially in infants and older adults.

### **Who is at risk?**

Infants and young children are most at risk. Older adults and people with compromised immune systems are also at increased risk.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms usually include: runny nose, decreased appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever, and wheezing. More serious infections may include complications, such as bronchiolitis and pneumonia. Very young infants may only show irritability, poor feeding, or turning blue with cough or brief periods of no breathing.

### **How is it transmitted?**

Transmission is through droplets in the air that are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land on the eyes, nose, or mouth. They also land on surfaces and objects, which are touched by hands, which may be rubbed into the eyes or put into the mouth.

### **How is it prevented?**

- Hand washing regularly
- Avoiding contact with sick persons
- Disinfect surfaces (and commonly touched areas like doorknobs) regularly
- Covering mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing

### **What are the treatments?**

There is no specific treatment for RSV, but most infections go away on their own within two weeks. Fever and pain can be treated with over-the-counter medications. Drinking adequate water is important when infected with RSV. Medical attention is necessary if there is difficulty breathing or dehydration especially for young infants and older people.

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