



RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus): What You Need to Know

What Is RSV?

RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) is a respiratory virus that affects the lungs and breathing passages.¹ RSV is common. Most children will get an RSV infection by age 2. Every year, the number of people with RSV usually increases in the fall and is highest in the winter.² People can get an RSV infection at any age. You can also get RSV more than once in your life.

In 2022, RSV arrived earlier than usual. The number of hospitalizations associated with RSV generally peaks in late December and in January. However, the number of hospitalizations in October 2022 was similar to peak levels.³

What Are the Symptoms of RSV?

RSV symptoms are usually mild and similar to having a cold. Symptoms include a runny nose, decreased appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever, and wheezing. In young infants, the only symptoms may be irritability, decreased appetite, and breathing difficulty.

Symptoms can quickly become worse. It is important to watch for worsening symptoms. Some people need medical attention if they have trouble breathing.

Symptoms usually develop four to six days after coming in contact with the virus.⁴ Most RSV infections go away on their own in one to two weeks. Older adults and infants who are younger than 6 months are at higher risk of developing a severe RSV infection that requires medical assistance.

Contact your health care provider if you think you or your loved one has RSV. Your health care provider may offer a test for RSV.

How Is RSV Treated?

There is no treatment for RSV. However, you can take steps to relieve symptoms:

- Manage a fever or pain by taking over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- Drink lots of liquids. This will help prevent dehydration.
- Call your health care provider if you or your loved one has difficulty breathing, is not drinking enough liquids, or has worsening symptoms.

Important: If your child or infant has RSV, follow the guidelines below:

- Never give aspirin to children.
- Infants younger than 6 months only need to drink breast milk or infant formula.
- Ask your health care provider if it is safe to give your child nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines contain ingredients that are not good for children.

How Does RSV Spread?

RSV spreads through person-to-person contact with someone who has an RSV infection or an object that the person has touched. The virus can spread in a variety of ways:

- When someone with an RSV infection coughs or sneezes.
- When droplets (that contain the virus) from a cough or sneeze get in your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- When you have direct contact with (such as kiss) someone with RSV.
- When you touch a surface that has the virus on it and then touch your face before washing your hands.



RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus): What You Need to Know (Continued)



People with RSV are usually contagious (able to spread the virus to others) for three to eight days. They may become contagious one to two days before showing symptoms.⁵ Some people, especially infants and people with weakened immune systems, can be contagious for up to four weeks.

How Can We Prevent the Spread of RSV in Our Communities?

Slow the spread of RSV by following these steps:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, not your hands.⁶
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid close contact with others, such as shaking hands and sharing cups.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces (such as doorknobs) often.

Sources:

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