

Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection

What is respiratory syncytial virus?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RESS-per-uh-TOR-ee sin-SISH-uhl VIE-russ), or RSV, causes fever, stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, and cough. Your child is more likely to get RSV between October and May. Most of these infections are mild. Younger children are more likely to get a lung infection and have breathing problems and wheezing. Babies who are younger than three months, who were born early, or who have certain medical issues are more likely to have problems from RSV.

How can I tell if my child has it?

The doctor will be able to tell by examining your child. An RSV test can be done by swabbing the inside of the nose, but it's not usually needed.

How is it treated?

Treatment is mainly for relieving symptoms. Be sure your child drinks plenty of fluids. Gently suctioning your baby's nose may help them eat and drink better.

RSV is caused by a virus, so antibiotics don't help. Steroids and cool mist aren't helpful either.

Over the counter pain medicine may be used

for discomfort or fever. Don't give cold or cough medicine unless your child's doctor says it's okay.

If your child isn't able to drink, IV fluids may be needed. Babies with a more serious infection may need to be in the hospital. The hospital or doctor's office may give your child oxygen to help them breathe. A respirator may be needed to help your child breathe, but this is very rare.

How does it spread?

RSV can be spread by contact with body fluids like saliva and mucus from a sick child's nose or mouth, or by objects that the child has touched. Having your child wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers may lower the risk of spreading the infection.

Children may return to day care when they have no fever and can eat and drink without problems.

What else can I do to prevent RSV?

- Avoid contact with people who have cold symptoms or fevers.
- Avoid large crowds during cold and flu season, especially if your infant is younger than three months.

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- Wash hands often.
- Breastfeed your baby for at least six months.
- Keep your child away from secondhand smoke, which can increase the risk and severity of RSV.
- Talk to your doctor about a special medicine to prevent RSV if your baby was born before 29 weeks or was born with heart problems. Toddlers younger than two years may also get the treatment if they were born with certain lung problems.

When should I take my child back to the doctor?

Talk to your child's doctor if your child has trouble eating or drinking, gets tired during feeding, or becomes sluggish. You should also see a doctor if your child is younger than 60 days and has a fever of at least 100.4°F (38°C), or if your child is having trouble breathing (such as taking 60 breaths or more per minute). See a doctor if your child seems to be getting worse.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/RSV-When-Its-More-Than-Just-a-Cold.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/rsv/>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/respiratorysyncytialvirusinfections.html>

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Notes from your family doctor