

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

## What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common virus that infects the lungs and airways (breathing passages). RSV can affect anyone of any age, but it's most common in infants and young children. Almost all children get RSV at least once before they are 2 years old. RSV is usually a mild disease that goes away on its own. In very young children RSV can sometimes lead to serious infections like pneumonia or bronchiolitis.

## What are the symptoms and duration of RSV?

In most children, RSV usually causes symptoms similar to the common cold:

- stuffy or runny nose
- cough
- decrease in appetite and energy
- fever
- wheezing

## How is RSV spread?

RSV is most common between late fall and early spring. RSV spreads the same way as a common cold such as by breathing in air contaminated with the virus when an infected person coughs or sneezes or by touching surfaces contaminated by the virus, such as hands, toys, door handles, furniture or pillows.

## How is RSV prevented?

Children in day-care centers and preschools are at greatest risk for RSV. Infants are at greater risk if they have an older brother or sister in school. RSV is an especially contagious virus because it can live on surfaces for hours, and is easily passed from person to person.

Still, there are many things you can do to reduce your child's risk of getting RSV:

- Wash your hands and your child's hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Good and frequent hand-washing is the best way to prevent RSV infection.
- Avoid people who are sick with colds
- School-age children who have a cold should be kept away from younger siblings, especially infants until the symptoms pass.
- Do not let your child share things that could easily pass germs, like cups, spoons or pillows.

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society (2016). Respiratory Syncytial Virus  
Canadian Lung Association. (2015). Respiratory Syncytial Virus

*This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.*

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at  
625-8318 or toll free 1-888-294-6630 ex. 8318**

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